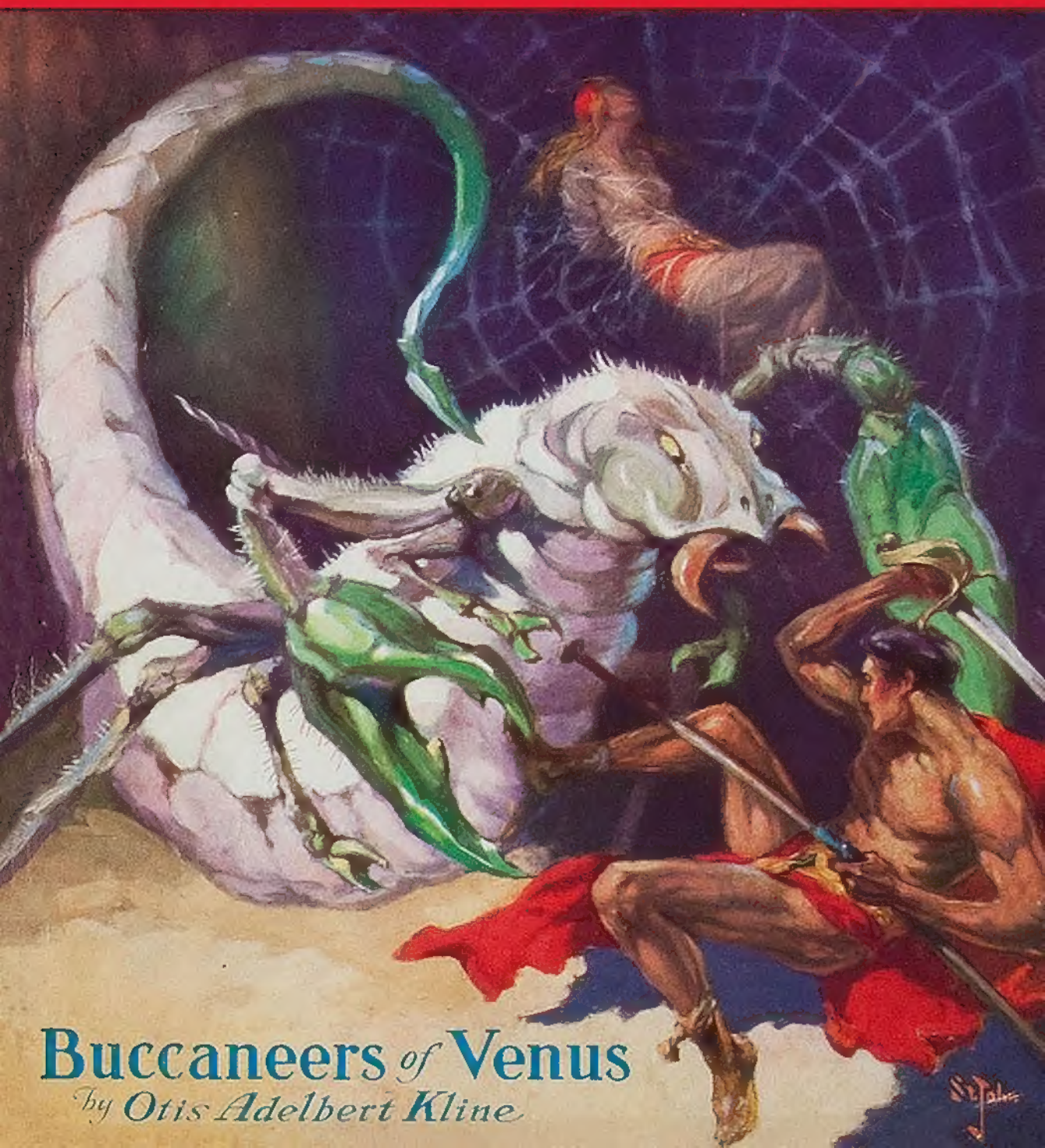
HUGH B. CAVE • HENRY S. WHITEHEAD • KIRK MASHBURN • DONALD WANDREI

Weird Tales

FEB. 25¢



Buccaneers of Venus

by Otis Adelbert Kline

"Take me away from him!"

"Lock me up so I cannot escape—beat me if you like—and I will tell you all I know. But while HE is my master I will not betray HIM!"

Terrified, trembling, she crouched there—an exotic vision from the Orient—pleading with the stern-faced detective to save her from the fiend she called "Master!"

Who was this girl—whose rare loveliness stood out so richly against its setting of murder and deviltry?

Who was this Yellow Monster who plucked men from life and left no clue behind?

What were the strange bonds that made her his slave?

If you would join London's greatest detectives in unwinding this and many other equally baffling Oriental Mysteries—if you would match your wits against the most diabolical Oriental cunning ever conceived—then by all means send at once for Your Free Examination Set of

If you would enjoy exciting and unbelievable adventures as you plunge from the bright world of the West into the dubious underworld of the East—send for your free examination set while this offer is still open!

MASTERPIECES of ORIENTAL MYSTERY

11 Volumes of Matchless Thrills by SAX ROHMER

NO ORDINARY mystery stories are these, but the hidden secrets, mysteries and intrigues of the Orient itself!

Before your very eyes spreads a swiftly moving panorama that takes you breathless from the high places of society—from homes of refinement and luxury to sinister underworlds of London and the Far East—from Piccadilly and Broadway to incredible scenes behind idol temples in far off China—through the jungles of Malay along strange paths to the very seat of Hindu sorcery.

Here you meet the mysterious and mighty Dr. Fu Manchu; the crafty Sin-Sin-Wa, with his one-eyed raven; or Kazmah, the dream reader; and scores of other amazing and picturesque personalities.

Be the first in your community to own these, the most wonderful Oriental Mystery stories ever published—books that have sold by the hundred thousand at much higher prices—books you will enjoy reading over and over again.

Handsomely bound in substantial cloth covers, a proud adornment for your table or shelf.

THE GREATEST MINDS OF OUR TIME REVEL IN GOOD MYSTERY STORIES

These are the sort of stories that famous statesmen, financiers and other great men read to help them relax—to forget their burdens. To read these absorbing tales of the mysterious East is to cast your worries into oblivion—to increase your efficiency.

PRICED FOR QUICK SALE

Cutting royalties to the bone and printing these volumes by the hundred thousand when paper was cheap make this low price possible. But the number is limited; so mail your coupon to-day!

COMPLETE SETS FREE ON APPROVAL

You needn't send a cent. Simply mail the coupon and this amazing set will go to you immediately, all charges prepaid. If it fails to delight you, return it in ten days at our expense, and you owe us nothing.

MAIL TODAY—YOU RISK NOTHING

Dept. 176
9-32
McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE
114 E. 16th St., N. Y.

Send me for free examination, charges prepaid, your set of Masterpieces of Oriental Mystery, in 11 handsome cloth volumes. If after 10 days, I am delighted, I will send $1.00 promptly and $1.00 a month for only 14 months; when you receive my first payment you are to send me the Gurkha Kukri without extra cost. Otherwise, I will return the set in 10 days at your expense, the examination to cost me nothing.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... *State* .....

Occupation .....

Age: Over 21? ..... *Under 21?* .....

FOR CASH DEDUCT 5%

This rare PREMIUM—YOURS for prompt action!

This famous Gurkha Kukri of solid brass, 6½" long, is an exact replica of that used by the Hindu soldiers in the World War and so graphically described by Kipling in his stirring story "The Drums of the Fore and Aft." Exquisitely wrought on both sides in an ancient symbolical design. A rare curio to have and useful as a letter-opener, a paper-weight or a protection on occasion. A limited quantity on hand will be given without added cost as a premium for promptness—but you must act today!

McKinlay, Stone & Mackenzie Dept. 176, 114 E. 16 St. New York, New York.

A Brand New Magazine

With A Brand New Idea!

Now On Sale — 15c

THROUGH space to the most distant corners of the universe with the speed of thought. The MAGIC CARPET goes places and those who ride upon it see things hidden to most eyes, and feel to the full the glamor of far places. This is the magazine you have been waiting for all your life—*the supreme magazine,* in which you can experience as nowhere else the thrill and witchery of adventure and romance in distant lands. A panorama of exotic fiction with the whole universe as its setting will unroll before your gaze as you speed onward upon the MAGIC CARPET.

H. BEDFORD-JONES
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE
WARREN HASTINGS MILLER
HUGH B. CAVE
JAMES W. BENNETT
E. HOFFMANN PRICE

and others

Don't be shut out . . Get your copy today . . Line forms on the right

If your magazine dealer is sold out mail 15c to the Publishers at 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 21 CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1933 Number 2

Cover Design ..... J. Allen St. John
Illustrating a scene in "Buccaneers of Venus"

De Brignac's Lady ..... Kirk Mashburn 147
A sensational goose-flesh story of baby vampires

The Fire Vampires ..... Donald Wandrei 179
A scourge struck from the sky, killing countless thousands

The Chadbourne Episode ..... Henry S. Whitehead 191
A shuddery graveyard tale—ghastly happenings—half-gnawed bones

The Head of Wu-fang ..... Don C. Wiley 201
A Chinese mandarin exacts a fearful punishment upon those who brought him to death

The Cult of the White Ape ..... Hugh B. Cave 210
A horror-story of the Dark Continent, where evil magic is still worked

The Mirror ..... George Burrowes 225
A strange story of a weird happening in the depths of a looking-glass

Buccaneers of Venus (part 4) ..... Otis Adelbert Kline 237
Breath-taking adventures amid the eery perils of another planet

The Cripple ..... Maurice Level 252
A grim, tragic story of a French peasant who stood helpless while a girl drowned

The Mandrakes ..... Clark Ashton Smith 254
A tale of sorcery, and weird homunculi that grew in the grave of a murdered man

Weird Story Reprint:

The Cats of Ulthar ..... H. P. Lovecraft 259
A brief masterpiece from one of the early issues of WEIRD TALES

The Eyrie 262
A chat with the readers

The Vanishing of Simmons ..... August W. Derleth 266
A strange tale of voodoo and the malevolent power of a jealous mulatto woman

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States, $4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1933, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

De Brignac's Lady

By KIRK MASHBURN

"Will you tell?" he grated; "will you tell me where you lie by day?"

A story of baby vampires—gouging, biting, scratching—an utterly strange tale of infant marauders belonging to the Undead

1. *Death Strikes Bonne Chasse*

"*IF THE end should overtake me before you arrive——*"

This was my first word of Armand de Brignac in upward of two years. With his alarming, almost incoherent letter spread before me as I packed my bags, and with no more understanding than I had gained on first perusal, I read again:

Dear Wynne:

Can you come to Bonne Chasse? Rather, you *must* come! This is a matter that concerns not only myself, but the safety—the immortal souls—of hapless others.

If the end should overtake me before you arrive, you know the address of my attorneys. I have drawn my will in your favor, and arranged a power of attorney in your name, should I disappear with my death unestablished. In either circumstance, you will find old black *Tante* Celie somewhere about the place—though not within the house—and she will tell you enough to guide your future actions.

However incredible her story, if it happens you are forced to seek her out, you must believe her—you *must* believe her!

I have not, as you know, a single living kinsman; there is no other to whom I can turn in my distress. Do not fail me, Wynne; and come as quickly as you may. Hasten, *mon ami!*

Yours, as ever,

DE BRIGNAC.

Our lifelong friendship left de Brignac no room to doubt that I would answer his unusual summons without question, and with all dispatch; nor did any other course occur to me. Beyond the actual hours consumed in my rapid journey from the North, there was very little time to account for, from my receipt of Armand's letter to the moment I stepped from a noon train in New Orleans.

Bonne Chasse, plantation and country seat of the de Brignacs since French Colonial days, lies some twenty miles down-river from the city. I had telegraphed Armand to expect me, and the uneasiness I had felt since first reading his puzzling message was not allayed by his absence at the station, and the failure of a servant to meet me in his place.

Stepping into a telephone booth in the station, I called the number listed under Armand's name in the local-long-distance section of the directory. At my insistence, the operator made repeated unsuccessful attempts to establish the desired connection, until I finally accepted her report that my party did not answer.

After some hesitancy, I determined first of all to call upon Armand's attorneys. In keeping with my lack of further definite plans, I left my bags in the depot checkroom, and consumed a hasty luncheon in a near-by restaurant. A short while later I entered a dingy suite of offices that belied the repute of their occupants, and asked to see that grizzled old barrister, Judge Henry Claybourne.

I HANDED my card to an exceedingly pretty girl, who, I made note, had brown hair of a shade that was almost auburn, and the most disturbing pair of deep blue eyes that I have ever seen. Glancing at the bit of pasteboard, the girl smiled regretfully.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Randall, but the judge is in court, and young Mr. Claybourne is out of town. Could your business wait until later this afternoon?"

I considered for a moment, in some hesitancy, whether I should go on down to Bonne Chasse. Although I had wired Armand of my coming at the commencement of my journey, his failure to meet me at the train left me uncertain as to whether he had received my message and was expecting me. I wondered, also, at the failure of my attempt to telephone him from the station. However, I decided to go to Bonne Chasse.

"I don't think I can get back this afternoon," I told the young lady. "I intend to hire a car and go down the river to the de Brignac plantation, and I don't know just what my plans will be after I get there."

"Oh," the girl exclaimed, with sudden interest, "Mr. Armand de Brignac's place?" Then, in some confusion, she hurried on, "If you're going to hire a car, my younger brother has been out of a position, and rather than be idle, he has been using our car—that is—he——"

"Why, of course!" I responded. "I'd be delighted to let him take me down, Miss—er——"

"Jackson!" she breathed in relief. "I know where to 'phone Andrew, and if you'll sit down, I'll have him here in just a minute."

Miss Jackson's brother showed up in a little more than the minute she had promised, and I liked the boy on sight. He was a clean-cut, intelligent-looking youngster, hardly more than twenty-one or -two. I speedily struck a bargain with him; and, after I had thanked his sister, we set out at once for Bonne Chasse.

When we had reached the plantation, I showed Jackson where to turn off the highway into a road leading across the estate, and we drove between double

rows of ancient oaks until we came to the Big House of the de Brignacs.

THE sun was bright, and had fulfilled its earlier promise of one of those balmy, spring-like days that I had sorely missed in the chill winter of the North. Even so, the shadows under the long double row of gnarled oaks that led from the highway to the house seemed too somber, and at sinister variance with the brightness of the day. The impression remained as, bidding Andrew to wait, I knocked at the closed door upon which I had never felt the need to knock before.

It was odd that the door should be closed at such an hour; odd, likewise, that I had seen no living creature about the grounds on my way up from the main road. Stranger still (knock upon the door with increasingly impatient fist as I would) was the fact that I, who came in answer to a summons, should receive no answer to my own.

Acting upon the thought, I moved aside from the door, and peered in at the windows opening upon the front veranda. I had not previously noticed that all the window-blinds were closed, and my testing fingers proved them thick with dust, as were also the panes of glass I could feel by prying between the wooden slats.

Taking Armand's letter from my pocket, I confirmed only what I already knew: that it was written less than a week past, and that it specifically bade me to come to Bonne Chasse. In the face of this, Bonne Chasse lay shuttered and deserted, with dust and spiders' webs of more than one week's accumulation between the interstices of the blinds.

The house, like all those in that region of potential floods, was built upon high pillars, so that it had, in effect, a capacious basement entirely above ground. The brick walls of this under-story were flush with the walls of the house proper, and the paved open space between them and the outer pillars supporting the floor of the veranda formed a sort of cool, covered pergola, which would, normally and in such pleasant weather, have been put to those uses which the comparison suggests; or, on the side hidden from the road, devoted to sundry domestic activities. I descended from my fruitless inspection of the porch, and made a round beneath it, with similar results.

Here below, the shutters were solid, and I could not peer between them, but the dust upon the pavement was a quarter-inch in depth—except in one place, beneath a window at the back of the basement. At this spot, the thick dust was shuffled away, in a kind of irregular path across the bricks, and footprints were plainly discernible. I stooped closer, and I do not know what faculty of intuition caused the chill feeling with which I recognized, among the large tracks a man would make, the unmistakable impressions of a woman's small and shapely foot.

I looked at the shutters over the window. The cracks in the joints of the hinges showed sharp and clearly defined, lacking the film of rust which quickly accumulates in the humid atmosphere of the region. The seal of spiders' web was missing. It was evident that this window was in use—but why, and by whom?

Uneasily I debated whether to return to the city and again seek to consult with Judge Claybourne, or find black old *Tante* Celie, for what light she might shed upon this growing mystery. De Brignac's letter suggested both courses, but I decided upon the latter to begin with, as I was already upon the grounds. I re-entered the car, and Andrew drove, under my direction, to where I knew were situated the cabins that housed the plantation's laborers.

Although, in the light of what I had already seen and learned, I should have been in some measure prepared to find the quarters lifeless, the actual discovery of their appalling emptiness came as a shock. Filled with life and bustle, and the almost certain ready laughter of their natural tenants, those rude and weathered cabins would have possessed a simple homeyness, and a touch of the picturesque, to redeem their barren lack of beauty. Now, lifeless and forlorn, they seemed, in their desolation, far more squalid and dilapidated than the meanest hovels. I shuddered, touched by something more oppressive than mere brooding silence, unnatural as that was. I was wondering of the *cause*. . . .

"HALLO!" I shouted, not knowing which cabin Aunt Celie might occupy—if, indeed, it was reasonable to hope that the silence hid the presence of any living thing. The sound of my voice served only to emphasize the recurring stillness.

"There are some clothes hanging on the line behind that cabin, yonder," commented Jackson, pointing.

I followed the direction of his finger, and saw that what he said was true. There hung the capacious garments of some girthy negress; and, judging by the defiantly serviceable nature of certain old-fashioned undergarments exposed to our inspection as we walked nearer, their owner was no wench of youthful years and yearnings. In spite of my somber mood, I chuckled as I looked.

A second hail to the cabin produced no more result than the first, although the clothes upon the line had all the indications of recent washing. I noticed that the door of the cabin was slightly ajar, and placed my foot upon the rude steps that descended from the threshold directly to the ground. Suddenly, as I stepped upward, I knew that I wanted to turn around, to be away from that place as quickly as I might. Without going further, I *knew* that I stood upon the edge of unholy discovery. . . . I did not want to enter that shanty!

I stepped unwillingly through the door. At once, a faint sickening odor assailed my nostrils—the place stank with the foulness of a charnel-house—and I experienced a wave of nausea. Only the light coming through the open door relieved the shuttered obscurity of the room; but we could see, plainly enough, the rude bedstead in one corner . . . the huddled shape . . .

"Open the window!" My dry lips hardly framed the words.

Jackson threw back the solid shutter from the single unglazed window, and the clean afternoon sunshine had that much more chance to dispel the fetid murkiness of the room. I was thankful that I could see better, that I did not have to go closer to that corner. . . .

Upon the bed, clad in the torn remnants of a clean though faded nightgown, and partly concealed by the disordered coverings, lay a thing that once had been Armand's black Mammy Celie. The body was contorted, as if a struggle had preceded death, and there were great brown stains of dried blood upon and all about it, particularly the upper part. It looked as if the throat had been ripped wide open. A different kind of horror overcame my previous squeamishness, and I moved closer, staring.

"Looks as if a dog, or some kind of animal, chewed her throat to pieces," Andrew's awed voice sounded in my ear.

It looked just like that! Whatever did it, it must have happened in the night, judging from the evidence, and as recent-

ly as the night before. The blood stains were hardly dry and brown.

I pushed Jackson through the door ahead of me, and the air was like balm to our nostrils. We climbed into the car and sped back toward the Big House in silence. Our throats crawled too much with nausea to endure the strain of speech.

2. *A Corpse Disappears*

NO WORD passed between us until Andrew applied brakes to the car, bringing it to a stop in front of the deserted mansion. Dismounting, I started to climb the front steps; but suddenly remembered that the doors were locked, and that I had no keys. Then I thought of the window underneath the veranda, toward which led footprints in the dust upon the pavement, and which had shutters with hinges bright from constant and recent use.

Acting upon the thought, I walked around to try for entry at this window, Andrew at my heels. My suspicions were justified when, in response to an inconsiderable effort, the shutters swung easily open, and I raised the sash.

The basement, familiar enough to me, was divided into quarters for the house servants, and a large room used for storage space. The door to this latter compartment was locked, but we were able to give the rest of the basement a hasty but unproductive inspection. Except under the window, where there was more dust than elsewhere, and so some further evidence of the footprints likewise visible on the outside, there was no indication of any intrusion or disturbance. Ascending the stairs to the house above, we found the rooms there equally deserted, but all more or less in order.

The library was the last room to come under inspection. Conspicuous upon a table, my searching gaze descried a leather-bound volume, reinforced with metal edges and supplied with a neat but efficient-looking lock. Gilt lettering on the leather cover proclaimed the book to be the diary of Armand de Brignac, and I felt that I was justified, in view of the disturbing import of my friend's letter, in forcing the lock which secured its pages. With some difficulty, and at the cost of complete ruination of the binding, I accomplished my purpose.

My inspection, however, was necessarily cursory, for I had to notify the authorities of the gruesome discovery of Aunt Celie's mutilated remains. Using the telephone in the hall, I soon apprised my old friend, Sheriff Grandison, of such details as I had knowledge.

"I'll notify the coroner, and be right over, Wynne!" The sheriff's voice on the wire was brusk and business-like as always, but I seemed to detect an added quality of harshness.

The house was supplied with electricity from a plant in the basement, and as the dusk was fast gathering, I switched on the lights and we settled down in the uncomfortable desolation of the place, to wait for the sheriff's arrival. We had not long to wait.

Through a window, I soon observed a pair of flickering headlights coming up the road in the deepening murk of late twilight. With a hair-raising screech of brakes, and a convulsive shudder as the ignition switch was turned off, a decrepit coupé came to an abrupt stop in front of the house. I ran down to the basement, and out through the one open window, calling to Grandison as he started up the front steps.

HASTILY explaining the locked doors, I shook hands with the lanky, grizzled old officer, whom I had known all

my life. Before I could give him my account of the tragedy in the negro quarters, a second and quite obviously smarter car sped up and parked behind the sheriff's vehicle. I greeted Doctor Duplessis, fat and affable, who had been the parish coroner for as long as I remember.

"What's up, Wynne?" puffed the doctor, after he had wrung my hand in both of his.

As briefly as I could, I told them what Andrew and I had found in Aunt Celie's cabin. They heard me through in silence, except for occasional cluckings from the voluble little doctor. The sheriff, who wasted few words, turned to Duplessis:

"All three of us can ride over to the quarters in your car: it would be a tight squeeze in mine."

Andrew had come out of the house and joined us. When I had introduced the youngster, Duplessis urged, with several dark hints I did not understand, that he be permitted to share the rumble seat with me, instead of remaining alone at the house. Obediently we climbed in, Grandison sharing the driver's seat.

As we rode, I wondered at the fact that, apparently, no plans had been made for the removal of the cadaver we were going to see. I voiced what was in my thoughts, and the sheriff favored me with a quick look over his shoulder.

"There ain't going to be any body!" The unexpected reply came clearly to me, through the open back of the car.

I repeated Grandison's statement in surprize, and demanded: "Why won't there be? What do you mean, sheriff?"

"Wait." There was a finality about the word that made me understand the futility of further questioning. Duplessis drove ahead without saying anything; but I sensed his excitement, and that but increased my own puzzlement.

We came to the quarters, and I picked out the cabin we sought, with the aid of a powerful electric torch that Grandison handed me. The sheriff took over the flashlight as we quit the car, and hustled briskly into the shanty. The other three of us followed at his heels, Andrew and I somewhat less briskly.

Grandison played the beam of light from his torch in a wide arc about the room, until it rested upon the bed in the corner. . . .

"Well?" grunted the sheriff, while I gave vent to my surprize.

It was undoubtedly the same bed: there were the same bedclothes, with the same unmistakable dark stains upon them. Beyond those disordered coverings, those sinister dark patches that were not a part of their quilted patterns—*the bed was empty!* The body was gone!

"I told you so," said the sheriff, with glum satisfaction.

"Where did the body go, then?" I demanded. "You must have had it moved, since you were so sure it wouldn't be here."

"No," disputed Grandison, "I didn't have it moved, and I don't know where it is—I wish to God I did!"

"You were sure the body wouldn't be here," I insisted, "so you must have an idea what happened to it."

"Yes," grimly assented the sheriff, "I got an idea, all right."

"What sort of an idea?"

I waited for an answer, but Grandison remained obstinately silent.

"It's after sunset," Duplessis quietly interposed, "and when people die as folks around here are going to say old Celie died, they—come to life—between sunset and dawn!"

"It's all right for them to say so—but do you believe that sort of rot?" I scoffed, conscious of a chill along my spine in spite of my ridicule.

"Unless you leave Bonne Chasse very quickly," gently replied the doctor, "you're likely to learn that a lot of things you've thought were rot are horribly true." I was convinced, now, that his quietness of manner, so unnatural under the circumstances in one of his voluble temperament, was forced in order to cover up his actual excitement.

"We might as well be going back," Grandison curtly interrupted. Then: "Are you going to stop at Bonne Chasse tonight?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's your business, but I wouldn't, if I were you," the sheriff advised darkly.

"I'll chance it," said I, as we climbed once more into the car.

When we had come again to the hall, Grandison added, abruptly, "Got a gun?"

"Why, no," I answered, getting out of the rumble seat.

"It's just as well that he hasn't," observed Duplessis, between whom and the sheriff there seemed to be understanding. "The kind of ammunition he'd be using wouldn't be any good. I have a gun I'll give him—one that's loaded *right*."

I took the pistol he proffered with his words, a compact, vicious-looking automatic of blued steel.

"What will I need this for?" I asked.

"I hope you don't!" fervently declared the old sheriff. "But if you see Armand's wife, or old Celie—*or Armand!*—for God's sake don't hesitate to shoot! I mean that!"

I hardly knew whether to laugh or shiver. Before I could do either, Grandison bellowed a hasty farewell, and departed amid a series of explosions from his Ford's exhaust, and a rattling of fenders that flapped as if the contraption vainly tried to fly.

3. *The Diary of Dread*

I STARED down the road for a moment, then turned blankly to Duplessis. I wondered if the sheriff had suddenly lost his mind.

"He went off as if there had been no murder," I protested, "or as if there were nothing for him to do about it, in case there has!"

"*Corpus delicti*, you know!" wryly enlightened the doctor. "There wasn't any *body*, and as far as Grandison *knows*, there wasn't any murder. That gives the sheriff all the excuse he needs, eager as he is to wash his hands of the matter."

I turned hotly to Andrew.

"Although the sheriff and the coroner seem indifferent," I cried, "the people of this house have disappeared, and you and I know that old Celie was murdered in her cabin. I am going to stay here and get to the bottom of all this, if it takes a year! I don't want to stay alone: are you game to stick with me, for at least a week—and begin tonight?"

Doctor Duplessis started to voice a protest, but I waved him contemptuously aside. Andrew readily agreed to remain with me, but stipulated the necessity of first making a flying trip back to town for some clothes, and to inform his sister of his plans, and make those various other arrangements which normally attend an unexpected absence from home.

I accepted the condition as being reasonable; the more so as it would have been necessary to send for supplies for our larder, in any event. I also wanted to get my own clothes in the hand-bags at the depot check room.

As I handed him money with which to purchase provisions for about a week, a further thought occurred to me. Having no desire to entrust my stomach to Jackson's ministrations, and still less to my own, I asked him whether it would not

be possible to obtain the services of a temporary cook—one he knew to be stedfast and reliable. I was willing to guarantee a week's wages, and named a sum which I knew to be generous.

"I don't know——" Andrew shook a dubious head. Then, brightening: "Tommie might come! If it's all right with you?"

"By all means," I assented. I had not the least idea who Tommie might be, but he evidently had Andrew's full approval, and I was entirely content to have the problem solved so readily. Andrew climbed into his car.

"I'll be back by nine o'clock," he promised, letting in his clutch. Duplessis had stood silently by during this time, until Andrew roared down the road; then I felt his hand upon my arm.

"Come into the house, son," he said to me, gravely paternal. "There's a lot in the way of explanation—and warning—coming to you."

"It's about time!" I agreed shortly.

HE ACCOMPANIED me through the basement window, puffing as he was forced to climb the stairs to the floor above. I led the way to the library.

"Well, Wynne," commenced Duplessis, when we were comfortably settled in our chairs, "everything around Bonne Chasse has been in a state of unrest since Armand returned from the war with his wife. You knew she had died, of course?"

"Why, no," I exclaimed, considerably taken aback at this unexpected news. My irritation, which had mounted steadily for some time, prompted my complaint: "There seems to be a whole lot around here that everybody knows but me!"

"How well did you know Armand's wife?" The doctor puffed on a cigarette, ignoring my outburst.

"Not very well," I answered. "We met her together, in Paris right after the Armistice, and Armand married her after an unbelievably short courtship. Beyond the fact that she had been a Russian countess, and fled to Paris to escape the Bolshevik proscription, I know nothing at all of her—except, that is, that she was fascinatingly beautiful"—I hesitated, searching for the right words—"beautiful as Circe and Delilah must have been."

I did not add, aloud, that I had disliked Armand's Countess Helene on sight. I had seen progressively less of my friend during our remaining days in Paris, following his marriage, and only occasionally after we had returned separately to New Orleans.

My father died while I was in France, and his death left me alone and brought about the crash that swept away his shrunken fortune. I struggled hopelessly until, at length, an opportunity to rehabilitate myself offered in the North; and nearly two years passed before I again walked along the bayous, or gazed upon the moss-bearded oaks I loved so well. Until today, when I came at Armand's call.

Duplessis snubbed his cigarette; and, breaking in upon my musing, abruptly exclaimed, "Armand's tenants and plantation hands had a sullen, frightened hatred of his wife. I have seen, with my own eyes, women snatch their babes from her reach, and even shield them from her mere glance—openly, on her own husband's estate.

"The house servants, most of whom had been employed at Bonne Chasse throughout their entire lives, gradually deserted their posts, giving Armand—they avoided their mistress—evasive reasons for their departures, or no reason at all. Finally, only faithful old Celie remained, of the original domestic staff."

The doctor paused long enough to light another of his cigarettes.

"The queerest part of it all," Duplessis continued, "was that it began to be noticed, by even the most casual observers, how Armand appeared to have developed the same deadly hatred for his wife that his dependents long had entertained. He plainly avoided her, and when he commenced gradually to show evidence of ill health—although I was his physician, he failed to ask my services—I surmised, at first, that he suffered from a nervous disorder, which could arise very easily, in one of his naturally high-strung temperament, over chronic domestic difficulties.

"Then I observed, on two occasions when I happened to see him, that he appeared unnaturally weak, and his throat was wrapped with a silk muffler, although the weather was warm. That made me wonder . . ."

"Go ahead," I said. He had paused, seemingly, to wonder again.

"Then," he resumed, "two small children disappeared. One of them was an infant belonging to the family of a brutish, illiterate moss-picker who had already faced one subsequently unproven charge of infanticide, some years ago. That passed. But, another babe disappeared, this time from equally lowly but much more reputable folk.

"The plantation hands, the shrimp-fishers and the moss-pickers on the bayous, said that Armand de Brignac's wife abducted them both! Abducted them for purposes upon which you may speculate for yourself!"

"What rot!" I cried. "What utter rot!" But I knew the possibilities of mongrel superstition.

"Wait," the doctor cried, his beady eyes alight with excitement that now was plainly manifest, "wait until I tell you something that you will think more outrageous than all the rest of it, combined:

"Do you know what Armand told me? He said, *'She should have been burnt at the stake! I would have driven a stake through her foul heart, except that I told Father Lavalle, and he watched to see that I did not!"*

Ignoring my startled exclamation, the doctor rushed on, with the air of one determined to finish a matter and be done with it:

"There remains to tell you that Armand himself disappeared a few days ago, about a week after his wife's burial. I know that he made one trip to the city, and visited Judge Claybourne's office. That is all I do know—all that any one *knows*—yet!"

Duplessis closed his words with an abrupt gesture, and awaited my comment with half-defiant expectancy. As a matter of fact, I was completely nonplussed, and I do not remember to have said much, if anything. Evidently with some relief, the doctor prepared to leave.

"Call on me if you need me," he urged, with another of his pats on the arm; "don't hesitate to use the 'phone at any time—day or night—if you need me for anything at all."

I thanked him and saw him to his car.

RE-ENTERING the house, I decided that the library would be the place to occupy my time until Andrew's return. I wanted to go through Armand's diary again.

I commenced at the first entry in the book, which was dated almost two years previously, and read through the pages that followed with systematic care. I found many vague references to Helene, of a nature to establish the fact of his hatred for her; and my startled conviction grew that his obscure and often incoher-

ent later entries revealed a progressive fear and horror of the woman he had married.

My search for pointed disclosures was first rewarded, however, where Armand's pen had scrawled words that spoke eloquently of the agitation that had unsteadied his hand:

"I am positive [I read] that she is what I have feared. My God! These tiny wounds in my throat, that will not heal, this awful weakness: this is *her* work! *And this foul creature of the night is my wife!*"

Entered a month later, another passage seemed to shout aloud from its smeared page:

"Some one has finally done it! The father of one of those pitiful babes, or some one else who knew or suspected enough to be in a frenzy of fear and hatred of my *'wife'* (God pity me!) fired from without a window of her room, and shot her through the head! There will be no hunt for her assassin—her executioner, I should say!—as Doctor Duplessis (who is the coroner) believed what I told him, and already had suspicions of his own. There were no witnesses, and Duplessis had the courage to sign a certificate of death from heart failure, in his other capacity of physician to my family.

"If only I could be sure that she is truly dead, that she can be killed in this fashion! I fear, instead, that there has been loosed upon the world a horror in all its fullness. I would have settled the point, but Father Lavalle will not believe me. He guards her body from the stake I have already sharpened. . . ."

Then, this last entry:

"I have written Wynne, today, but I fear I have waited too long.

"I found a woman's footprints, this morning, in the dust of the pavement at the basement window I left open when I closed up all the other doors and windows. I forgot to lock it last night, or it may be that she called me in my sleep and I opened it for her. She was here in the house. There are wounds in my throat again, and I feel that accursed weakness. . . . But I do not understand why, when I awoke, my hands were soiled with fresh earth. . . .

"Ah, if Wynne can but come in time!"

If I but came in time! I still did not know whether I had, or not. I had found enough to cause me consternation and apprehension, but nothing in Armand's diary disclosed his present condition or whereabouts. My head spun from my efforts to review, in rational fashion, what I knew of the whole incredible mystery.

THE circumstances in which I found myself involved gripped me, however, with less than enough intensity to subdue my growing hunger. I had lunched in the early part of the afternoon, and found myself wishing that Jackson would hurry his return with the elements of a makeshift supper.

As I helplessly dropped the diary back upon the table, I heard the throaty purr of a motor coming swiftly up the road. A car came to a stop in front of the house; and in a moment I heard Jackson's voice, and I thought I caught an indistinct reply. Good, thought I: the capable and enterprising youngster has kept his promise and brought us a cook, despite the shortness of the time he had in which to work.

I heard them walking over the bricks toward the basement window through which I had entered, and I started to meet them. The hall was lighted, and I had previously located a master switch near the stairway from below, that controlled the lights in the basement. I turned it on, as I heard footsteps climbing the stairs.

I waited a moment, and suddenly started with surprize and disbelief in the evidence of my eyes. With the reflection of the light giving it a sheen like spun gold, a ruddy mass of wavy hair, framing an eager, piquant face, bobbed up the stairs. Two wide, dark blue eyes looked brightly upward into mine, evident enjoyment of my stupefaction dancing in their depths. The girl who climbed the stairs was Judge Claybourne's secretary!

I stammered something, and the girl laughed. Close behind her, Andrew grinned triumphantly.

"I told you she'd come and keep house for us, didn't I?" he demanded.

"You did not!" I contradicted. "You said something about somebody named 'Tommie' coming back with you, but you certainly didn't mention this young lady——"

"Well, *this* is Tommie. I thought you'd remember meeting her in Judge Claybourne's office."

"Tomasine, Mr. Randall," the girl laughed. "Andrew isn't very definite at times, I fear. The young rascal"—she gave his arm an affectionate squeeze as she thus libeled him—"couldn't have kept me away after he told me what a perfectly gorgeous and goosefleshy mystery there is here. I've always wanted to be in on something real shuddery! Fortunately, I have had to defer my vacation this year, until now; and I have two whole weeks of my own, beginning tomorrow. I didn't have the means to do very much, and I was wondering how I was going to spend the time."

"Well," I stammered, "I——"

"After all," Tomasine reminded, with a smile that was the feminine counterpart of her brother's rake-helly grin, "you *did* want a cook, didn't you?"

I laughed. It was really funny, this idea of Judge Claybourne's secretary filling my order for a cook. At that, I reflected, it wouldn't be at all unpleasant to have her about; and she had an air of pleasant capability that promised much for our comfort. There was another side to it, however, and I sobered on reflecting that she might become involved in the events casting their somber shadows all about us. She read my thought.

"I'm capable of looking out for myself," she assured me. "I'm not given to hysterics, and that sort of thing. If Andrew can run risks, so can I; and besides, I know how much Judge Claybourne would like to have all this cleared up. He's an old dear, and if I can help you solve the mystery, I'll be doing him a favor."

When a woman—especially a young and very pretty woman—makes up her mind to something, mere man might just as well give way. I surrendered (secretly pleased that I could not avoid it), and helped Andrew carry provisions into the kitchen.

I was really too near starvation to argue, anyway; and I did full justice to the tasty meal that Tomasine quickly put together, of cold canned food that I had never before known could be made so palatable.

4. *De Brignac's Lady Appears*

AFTER we had eaten and then assisted Tomasine in tidying up, I led them to the library, which I favored because of its comfortable chairs. What Andrew had told her, and what she had learned in Judge Claybourne's office, put Tomasine in possession of most of the facts about happenings at Bonne Chasse. I showed her Armand's letter and his diary.

"How are you going to start about unravelling things?" she asked. "I get the impression you don't expect much assistance from the sheriff?"

"You're right about the sheriff," I admitted. "And frankly, I don't know just how to go about getting at the bottom of this affair. All this talk—mostly insinuations—about vampires and that sort of thing——" I finished with a gesture indicating my bafflement.

"Do you believe that part of it?" Tomasine asked.

I hesitated. "That's rather a strain on credulity, don't you think?"

"Well," Tomasine evaded, "what little I knew of Mr. de Brignac indicates him to have been a man not given to wild imaginings. What he has written, partic-

ularly what he implies, constitutes a basis for some pretty startling speculations."

I shook my head, moodily. I was beginning to fear that the affair was too much for me. Andrew offered a practical suggestion.

"It's after ten o'clock," he said. "Suppose we turn in and sleep on it. In the morning we can start out fresh, and we may find something that will give us a lead."

"Good idea," I agreed, and Tomasine nodded. "If we can't make any progress tomorrow, I am going to call in private investigators and see what they can do."

LONG habit gave me a preference for sleeping alone; but I had previously given a thought to occupying a room that was furnished with two beds. I sensed an underlying disquietude in my surroundings that caused me to welcome the prospect of Andrew using the extra bed. Immediately adjoining this room was another comfortably furnished chamber, to which I showed Tomasine.

I am ordinarily a sound sleeper, but I had reached that state of mental fatigue where I was actually too tired to rest well. When I did finally drift into fitful sleep, long after Andrew's regular breathing betrayed his untroubled slumber, I slept uneasily, troubled with confused fragments of disordered dreams.

It must have been well after midnight when I started into full wakefulness, gripped with a feeling that all within the house was not as it should have been. Through the windows of the room poured a flood of moonlight, and it was plainly to be seen that here at least was nothing to account for the apprehension with which I had awakened. Mentally and wearily I cursed the mad dreams that would not let me rest. Clearly, there was nothing in this room, no sound within the house, to warrant my disquietude. Nothing in this room . . . the words ran through my tired brain, with a sinister insinuation in the repetition. In *this* room!

Impelled by an impulse I could not resist, I slipped out of the bed. At least, I could take a look around, and so convince myself of my own foolishness. In case something should be wrong—after a moment of indecision, I took from beneath my pillow the pistol Doctor Duplessis had given me. Quietly opening the door, I slipped into the dark, unlighted hall.

The feeling that something was amiss grew stronger. Suddenly I caught my breath. There was a thin streak of moonlight athwart the hall—and it should not have been there! There was no way in which the moon could shine into that hall except through one of the rooms flanking it. The pencil of ghostly light came from within Tomasine's room—and I distinctly remembered seeing her close the door when she retired.

All my senses alert, I crept toward the barely opened door. I listened, straining my ears, but I heard no sound. The door was not sufficiently ajar for me to see within. Cautiously I opened it wider; and then I forgot caution at the scene that met my startled stare.

Tomasine's bed was near the windows, and I could partly see the outline of her body beneath the coverings. I say partly, because of the stooping figure that crouched over her, its back toward the door. The bending figure was shrouded in white, and there was something in its attitude that chilled me as I looked. Over all the scene the ghostly moonlight flooded.

I saw that the intruder was a woman, but I did not then perceive why that realization should send fresh shivers along my back. Whoever this intruder, she had no right to be there. Whatever her mo-

tive—suddenly, dread intuition prompting, I gave a hoarse cry. The crouching figure whirled, and I cried out again, with horror in my voice, but nothing of surprize. Something had whispered swiftly that I would gaze—as I was gazing—into the flaming eyes of Helene de Brignac!

"What are you doing here?" I demanded harshly.

The white, dead face smiled, and the smile was more dreadful than any grimace of hate. The eyes, curiously lifeless and yet at the same time lit with a cold, feral glare—those eyes burned into mine, held me spellbound and helpless. I knew, in that awful moment, that here was a horror that had no right to walk the earth. And I stood helpless, bound by the grip of those hellish orbs. The white-shrouded thing that had been Armand's wife glided toward me. Pallid arms reached out, white hands that were too white, with long slender fingers, reached under my chin . . . to bend back my head . . .

At the touch of those cold fingers, clammy with the chill of death, something snapped inside me, breaking the spell that held me enthralled. I leaped backward, a strangled cry in my throat, and fired pointblank with the pistol in my hand.

The shrouded figure screamed with pain, and I knew that I had scored a hit. It backed away toward the windows, one of which was open; while a fleeting thought of wonder flashed through my mind that, if she were what I thought, bullets could harm her. Then I remembered what the doctor had said about having the "right kind" of ammunition, and I felt swift elation.

"Silver bullets!" I cried, while the Thing screamed again and scampered for the window. She tumbled through the opening, spreading her arms so that her white shroud flapped in startling semblance of two monstrous, pallid bat-wings. I fired again as she leaped from the window-sill, and knew that I had missed.

NO MORE than a few minutes had elapsed since I had left my bed. Andrew was at my side, demanding:

"What's the matter? I heard your shot; what happened?"

"Wait!" I commanded. "Turn on the light and let us see to your sister."

The light snapped on, and we bent over Tomasine. She stirred and, gasping, struggled to a sitting position.

"Those eyes!" cried the girl. "Shining at me out of a dead face in the mist that seemed to come with her! . . . And her red lips . . . they were alive!"

"Who?" Andrew demanded. "Whose lips?"

"You aren't hurt," I soothed; I could see that her smooth, exposed throat bore no marks. Thank God I had been in time!

"For the love of heaven tell me what happened!" Andrew demanded in exasperation.

"Something—some whisper of instinct—wakened me and sent me into the hall," I told him. "I saw Tomasine's door ajar, and knowing that I had seen her close it, looked inside. I saw—Helene de Brignac—bending over your sister! I shot her once, I think, and missed her with another shot as she jumped through the window."

"All those stories must be true, then," whispered Tomasine.

I nodded, slowly and reluctantly.

"I'm afraid we've encountered something I didn't dream could exist."

"Hadn't we better look outside, under the window, and see if we can follow whatever it was that hopped through?"

This practical suggestion came from Andrew.

"Yes," I assented. "If you will stay with Tomasine, I'll have a look."

"I'm going too," Tomasine declared. "Wait until I slip on some clothes, and I'll be right with you—I don't think I want to sleep any more tonight!"

"I don't imagine any of us will sleep much more, tonight," I was forced to agree.

"Look," directed Andrew, "you hit her, all right! There's blood on the window-sill."

We hurried to the window, verifying the fact that at least one of my bullets had found its mark.

"It's her blood; no mistake about it," I said.

"Hurry!" Tomasine excitedly exclaimed. "If she is hit, she may not have been able to get away——"

"And I can complete the job," I finished grimly. "You're right. Come on, Andy!"

We returned to our room and hastily pulled on trousers over pajamas, slipping our feet into shoes. Buttoning my coat, I stepped into the hall, Andrew following. Quick as we had been, Tomasine came through her door at the same time, fully clad.

I turned the master switch at the head of the stairs, lighting the basement. Mentally, I resolved to have a locksmith come over as soon after daylight as I could get one, and have keys fitted to all the doors.

WE UNLOCKED the basement window and stepped out. The window through which the Thing had leaped was on the opposite side of the house, and we hurried around. There was no mark in the turf to indicate that anything had leaped from the veranda, falling heavily to the ground. Andrew remarked as much.

"Of course not," Tomasine pointed out. "It was stupid of us to expect it—naturally, she ran down the steps."

This was logical, so we ran to the steps, hoping to pick up the trail there. Sure enough, a flashlight revealed another of the dark stains upon a step, although it was only a small spot.

"She wasn't hit hard, evidently," Andrew deduced. "She didn't spill a whole lot of blood." He took my torch and swept it in a wide arc, illuminating the brick pavement beneath the veranda. Suddenly he gave a startled exclamation. "There's another stain!"

"And another!" cried Tomasine. "It looks as if she went around that corner of the house, under the porch."

Such indeed seemed to be the case. We discovered several more of the blood-stains, fairly marking the direction our quarry had taken. And the trail led plainly to that basement window through which we had just come!

We stared at one another in bewilderment.

"She's gone back into the house," Tomasine whispered.

I shook my head. "She can't have got in that way," I reminded. "The shutters were barred on the inside, up until the time we opened them. I'm afraid we're up a tree though; I suppose we may as well go back in the house, and wait for daylight."

While it seemed evident that nothing could have gained entrance to the house through the barred and solid shutters of that window, I was nevertheless careful to look about as we went inside, searching for more of the telltale stains that we had followed. I found none, however, and called attention to the fact with some relief. Again fastening the shutters, and

then the window, we passed to the floor above.

5. *The Traitor*

NONE of us felt that we wanted further sleep. We stayed in the kitchen while Tomasine made strong coffee, which we then took into the library, preferring to drink it there. The steaming beverage warmed and soothed us, in a measure restored our normal perspective. Tomorrow, I vowed, would see the end of the terror that gripped Bonne Chasse. I said as much, aloud.

Tomasine regarded me with a sudden puzzled frown.

"One thing that we seem to be taking very lightly," she pointed out, "is the fate or whereabouts of Mr. Armand de Brignac. If we could locate him, we should be able to solve the whole mystery."

"All we should discover," I disagreed, "would be Armand's own fate. As far as concerns what we have to do, I think I know that already. Much as my intelligence rebels at the idea, the evidence compels the belief that Helene de Brignac—*whom we saw tonight*—has become one of those monsters whose existence outside of folklore and legend I would previously have ridiculed: a vampire."

Tomasine shuddered, and her brother stared at me across his empty cup.

"Fortunately," I continued, with an uncomfortable feeling that, in spite of all we know, belief in such things was ridiculous, "very fortunately, the legends of vampires and werewolves that have come down to us from olden times, also tell us how to kill such horrors. Tomorrow, I intend to open Helene de Brignac's grave, and do what there is to be done——"

I saw Tomasine, who was sitting facing the door, gasp suddenly, and her eyes open wide, while a familiar voice interrupted:

"It won't be at all necessary, my dear Wynne!"

I whirled, with an exclamation of pardonable surprize, and beheld, standing in the doorway to the hall, none other than Armand de Brignac!

"Armand!" I cried. "Where did you come from?—and at this hour?" I rose to offer him my hand. Strangely, he made no move to accept it, but walked over and seated himself in an unoccupied chair.

"I've been away," he vaguely replied to my question. "I've just got back from —er—a trip. Sorry not to have been here when you arrived, after sending for you and all that, but I'll explain it satisfactorily in the morning: it's too long a story to tell now."

This did not seem at all like my friend of old, and there was an air about him, as well as a certain elusive suggestion, that faintly perturbed me.

I looked at him, for a moment, somewhat at a loss for words. Then, using what tact I could, I blurted out an account of our recent disturbing visitation. Armand listened in silence, and with astounding indifference. When I had finished, he ignored the entire subject! As if he had heard not even a word of what I said, he coldly observed:

"I see you have Judge Claybourne's secretary here"—he had dismissed Andrew with an uninterested glance—"which is fortunate, as it happens. I am faced with the necessity of again leaving Bonne Chasse—for a longer period of time, I fear, and there are some changes I would like to have made in my will. A codicil—I believe that is the correct term for it, Miss Jackson?"

Acknowledging Tomasine's affirming nod, he asked, "As you seem indisposed

to sleep, would you mind taking down the changes I have in mind—now? I am somewhat pressed for time. You can transcribe your notes on the typewriter on that table in the corner."

"Why do you want to draw up a codicil to your will at this ungodly hour, Armand?" I asked. "Can't it wait until morning?"

"I can't be here in the morning," Armand answered. "I want to be sure of certain arrangements, and there is no telling what may happen, nor when: 'In the midst of life we walk in death,' you know."

For some reason, the quotation seemed a ghastly thing to me. Perhaps it was because Armand's face was so white . . . so *dead*. . . .

"I don't mind," Tomasine said. "I believe I have a ruled notebook in my handbag. If you'll wait until I get it——"

I thought, at the time, that she left the library with more haste than was necessary, as if she feared, oddly, that her departure might be hindered. I have since realized that her feminine perceptiveness, more delicately attuned than my own, in a measure warned her of what was to follow.

"It was good of you to come, Wynne," Armand said, after a moment of silence. "I certainly owe you an explanation—and, in due course, you shall have one." It seemed to me there was a curious, underlying irony in his flat, almost perfunctory words.

"There's a lot more than your failure to meet me in need of an explanation," I answered, rather forcibly, as Tomasine reentered with a notebook and pencil.

She was hardly seated, her pencil poised, when Armand, as if he could not restrain his eagerness to be done with it, commenced to dictate.

He directed that I, as before, was to continue his sole legatee, inheriting his entire estate in the event of his death. There was one reservation, however, which constituted the simple substance of the codicil, and which was curious enough in its way. His house, with five acres of ground of which it was the center, was to be shut up and securely boarded, *to remain for ever unaltered or unoccupied by me, my heirs or assigns, or any other persons whatsoever!* A trust fund was provided to take care of taxes on the property thus reserved.

"Type it, quickly!" Armand urged Tomasine, when he had ceased dictating. He was positively in a fever to be finished with the matter.

Obediently, Tomasine sat down at the machine in the corner. There was not a great deal of typing to be done, and her shorthand pothooks were speedily transcribed into legible matter.

Swiftly, yet, so it seemed, apprehensively and anxiously, Armand read through the finished draft; after which he borrowed my fountain pen and affixed his signature. Returning the paper to Tomasine, he requested that she and Andrew sign as witnesses. To me he explained that, as I was his heir, it probably would be better to leave me out of it.

"I shall mail it to Judge Claybourne," he concluded, "along with a letter explaining that I am leaving the country for an indefinite period—perhaps for ever. I have no doubt," he informed Tomasine, with what sounded like sinister insinuation, "that your signatures can be verified, if necessary."

He rose from his chair, straightening to his full height. With the action, he discarded the mask that he had, with obvious impatience, compelled himself to wear.

"Now," he abruptly addressed himself

to me, "where is the weapon with which you wounded my wife?"

"Why," I stammered, taken aback at this sudden and unexpected turn, "I put it back under my pillow, in the bedroom."

"Ah!" breathed Armand. "Good—very good! And that being the case, let me show you something, my *dear* friend!"

Puzzled, but still unsuspecting, I watched as he walked over and took down a pair of bright rapiers from their pegs above the mantel. I noticed, as he flexed the long blades and tested their points with satisfaction, that Tomasine was watching him with a sort of tense expectancy. I heard her breath catch sharply, and vaguely wondered why, as Armand laid one of the weapons on the near-by table, raising the other in almost the same motion.

Tomasine fumbled in sudden desperation at something in her bosom. Then, to my utter stupefaction and horror, just as Tomasine jerked out the revolver I had left beneath my pillow—with an air of cold detachment, Armand buried his slender, vicious blade deep in Andrew's body!

6. *A Duel With the Dead*

TOMASINE'S weapon exploded as her brother clutched his side and, with a choked cry, fell to the floor. She had acted too late, however; for, with the same flick of his wrist that served to withdraw the *épée* after his thrust, Armand's blade lashed across her wrist like a whip, deflecting her aim and sending the gun spinning.

For one frozen second I had stood staring and rooted in my tracks, while Armand felled Andrew. Now I leaped for the pistol, determined to end this creature whom I saw revealed a fiend.

"One moment, my dear Wynne!" de Brignac mocked, the point of his swift blade forcing me back.

"You are another such thing as your wife!" I hotly accused, flinching in spite of myself before eyes that glowed redly in the dead waxen mask of his face.

"Is it not splendid," he leered, in tacit admission of my charge, "that, after the foolish hatred—at least on my part—that marred the association of our natural lives, my dear wife and I should finally be reconciled and share a closer kinship, a greater passion, than we could ever have known before?"

I made a furious gesture of revulsion, held in my tracks by the blade, the nonchalant, careless poise of which deceived me not at all. Armand—the Thing that had been Armand—wagged his head in mock reproach.

"How you misjudged her!" he chided. "How *I* misjudged her! All the while I loathed her, thinking her a thing of evil, intending only evil toward me, her lover and husband. Yet she sought merely to introduce me to that state of forbidden but transcendent ecstasy I now enjoy."

"Why, then, did you write me, begging me to save you from the obscene condition of which you now—damn you!—so glibly boast? You, whose least foulness is the murder of that boy: I ask you—*why?*"

"Because I was blind," he answered regretfully, "and did not realize what I did. I have since learned much. I have learned delights that burn in their intensity; of nights that are a delirium of joy. Doubtless the days I spend in the cold earth with my Helene would not be pleasant, except that we sleep the dreamless, unknowing slumber of death. But our nights together, when we revel to our satisfaction . . . ah, the nights!"

"Monster!" I grated, calculating my chances of reaching the pistol on the

floor, or the sword on the table. I wondered whether, if I should create a sudden distraction, Tomasine could get the gun. She looked tearfully up at me, from where she knelt beside Andrew, and I think she read my thought aright. But Armand also understood.

"Come," he urged, "be reasonable. You can not hope to get the pistol, and you have no need of stratagem to obtain the sword. You must realize, of course, that friendship belonged to you and that Armand I once was: to all those things that, for me, are past. Yet there is some lingering sentiment, for which Helene chided me (and to which she is a stranger) that moves me still to make some concession to bygone friendship."

"Just as you made concession to the loyalty and devotion of your old black mammy," I bitterly interrupted. Armand smiled, with the air of one correcting a child.

"Even there," he enlightened, "Helene had to—to do what was done. It had to be done: old Celie knew too much." He laughed, a grating, sardonic laugh. "What annoyed Helene most was that I had some slight added compunction on account of the old woman's color!"

"Let's finish this," I panted, afraid that my fury would unsteady my nerves. "You intimated that you were willing for me to have the other sword. If so——"

"Yes," mockingly conceded de Brignac; "take it—for dead friendship's sake." He lowered his point, and I feverishly seized the rapier that glittered upon the table.

OUR blades leapt up in swift salute; a split second later and they swept into play. I laughed as steel met steel. It was a mere matter of tradition that we should both be expert swordsmen; but I knew myself to wield the faster blade, to possess the stronger wrist. Swordsmanship is the one and only accomplishment at which I have excelled. Armand matched my laugh with a sneering, mocking grin.

"I said a trace of sentiment remained for friendship, my cockerel," he taunted, "and that is right—a *bare* trace." He parried a thrust that I had been sure would prove his undoing, laughing in his turn. "Do you think me a fool? Bah! It is you who are the fool: I have powers the old Armand never had. No mere mortal swordsman could stand against me now!"

By the barest margin, I parried a thrust that nearly passed my guard. I countered with a thrust of my own, only to have it deftly swept aside.

Dimly, I was aware that Tomasine, white-faced and staring, strained forward on her knees beside Andrew, watching us with fascinated horror.

Back and forth within the limited space at our disposal, we weaved and strained. Once Armand stumbled against a chair; then my blade furrowed his wrist. First blood! Armand merely jeered:

"What matter? Again I say you are a fool: if you thrust me through the heart, yet—*steel can not kill me!*"

That was true! A vampire could be killed, made truly dead for all time, only by a wooden stake driven through its heart, or——

"Tomasine!" I shouted. "Get the pistol—*it's loaded with silver bullets!* I'll hold him away from you, but in God's name, be quick!"

Desperately I beat at de Brignac's seemingly enchanted blade. Sweeping his point over my head, I stepped in close, trying for a desperate maneuver. As we strained, toe to toe, I suddenly whipped my sword downward, away from his steel, describing a narrow arc that ended in a hammering blow of my guard against the heel of

his blade. I had hoped to disarm him, or at the risk of breaking my own, at least to snap his weapon. As it was, Armand shifted, so that my trick failed; and he came near to ending me with a furious counterthrust.

I knew that I had met more than my match, felt myself weakening. Tomasine must hurry, slip past Armand and get that pistol, or it would soon be too late. And with me disposed of, she would be left alone with—that—Thing. . . .

My last strength went into a desperate engagement of Armand's blade, to keep it from me and so give Tomasine another second. I knew, now, that I had no hope of doing more. Tomasine must dodge past our weaving legs, past our biting, snarling blades that swung, straining, in a fanned arc from side to side.

"Hurry!" I panted, grudging the breath it cost me. Then I saw that her fingers had reached the butt of the gun—knew that Armand saw. *"Silver bullets!"* The phrase seemed to sing from my tired blade.

With a yelp of fear, de Brignac leaped away, flinging his sword point-foremost at my throat. Taken unawares, I parried tardily, and it scratched my skin. But that was all; and Armand, with one last snarl of mingled fright and rage, scampered down the hall before Tomasine could fire. Seizing the pistol from her hand, I rushed in hot pursuit.

7. *Tomasine Declines to Quit*

ARMAND was not in sight in the hall, but I felt certain that he had not entered any of the rooms opening from it. For one thing, I knew that all the doors had been closed, and I had heard no noise such as he must have made in his haste, had he opened one of them. Aside from that, I had an instinctive conviction that he had scuttled down the stairs to the basement. And the door to the stairs was open. . . .

Hastily I threw on the light switch, and bounded recklessly below. Although I ransacked the basement from end to end, there was no sight of Armand. Then I thought of that window which was, so far, the only way into and out of the house. As I had suspected, the bolt was drawn, the heavy shutters slightly ajar. . . . This was the way my bird had flown. I knew that the pursuit into the night was useless; and above was Andrew, wounded, perhaps killed, by the monster who once had been my dearest friend. Again I barred the window, and retraced my way upstairs.

I found Andrew half unconscious and very weak, apparently from loss of blood. Tomasine had already summoned Doctor Duplessis, with whom she was acquainted through her connection with Judge Claybourne. We put the youngster to bed, making him comfortable and stanching his wound as best we could; after which there was nothing for us to do but sit and wait, and watch for the doctor's arrival.

To do him justice, Duplessis was not long on the way. We heard his car speeding up the road and, shortly, the doctor bustled into the basement and up the stairs. With only a few words about what had happened, I let Tomasine hurry him in to her brother.

After a careful examination, Duplessis greatly relieved our fears by expressing his belief that Andrew's hurt was not grave. No vital organ appeared to have suffered injury.

Naturally, the doctor was consumed with curiosity, and demanded full details of our encounter with Armand, and his wounding of Andrew. So I led him once again into the library, where Tomasine served the coffee she had hastily prepared.

As I rapidly related what had happened, from the time of Armand's startling appearance to his escape, with me in hot pursuit, Duplessis listened with absorbed interest. When I had finished the narrative, he rose to take his leave.

With grave friendliness, and an assuring hand upon my shoulder, he promised: "If there's any way I can help you, Wynne, I've already told you I'll be glad to do it. I'll be back to see the young man, some time in the morning. If you'd like me to, I think I can arrange to stay a while and help you settle this affair."

I thanked him sincerely, gladly accepting his offer. With a kindly word of encouragment to Tomasine, the doctor took his leave. I accompanied him to our basement exit, then hurried back to the girl.

"I've just looked in at Andrew," she said, "and found him sleeping." A shadow of anxiety clouded her eyes. "I do hope that funny little fat doctor is right in saying his wound is not serious."

"I am confident that he is right," I soothed her. "Some of the people down here are rather primitive, and knife and gunshot wounds are probably less of a novelty to Doctor Duplessis than to most of his urban colleagues."

"I don't want to go back in that room alone," Tomasine complained irrelevantly. "I'm worn out, and so sleepy I can hardly hold my eyes open, but I'm afraid to go back to sleep."

"Well," I suggested, "why not curl up in that big chair and rest a while? We've only about two hours to wait for sunrise. . . . It sort of gives me the creeps, too, to think about sleeping in this house at night."

Tomasine shivered and nodded. "Yes," she agreed, "at night, when those—*Things*—are alive."

Her head drooped, bravely as she tried to stay awake and talk to me. Poor girl! She had been in the house less than one full night, and had, in that time, encountered a tumult of fear and horror greater than falls to the lot of an average person in a lifetime.

I SAT and watched her, settled comfortably in the depths of the great soft chair, saw her succumb to the weariness that showed in her heavy eyes, in the droop of her tired mouth. She slept.

In relaxation, one slender, rounded leg displayed a disquieting length of sheer, shimmering hose. Above the other knee, half tucked away beneath her, I had a glimpse of smooth, white flesh. In sudden confusion I averted my eyes, feeling guilty of unfairness and, under the circumstances, oddly embarrassed.

A surge of tenderness swept me. Tomasine was so sweet, so brave and capable! Under the strain of what she had endured, the average woman would have been a hysterical wreck. Well, tomorrow she must leave, go back to town and away from this breeding-place of horror. Meanwhile, I made sure that the pistol, with its remaining bullets of silver, lay on the table, ready to my hand. Until sunrise brought safety, I would watch and guard her.

But I, too, was tired. Just for a moment, I closed my eyes, so heavy had they become. Just for an instant, and then I would rouse, throw off this creeping lethargy. My lids felt as if they must have been weighted with lead . . . I was so . . . tired. . . .

Morning came. I awoke with a guilty start, and much the same feeling that must come to a sentry on wartime duty who awakes to the realization of having slept at his post. The sun was streaming in through the windows. My feeling of guilt gave way to a sense of thankfulness that the night of horror was safely past.

Taking care to make no noise, I rose and slipped from the room. Entering the bedchamber on tiptoe, I first satisfied myself that Andrew still lay in apparently normal sleep; after which I went to the kitchen, and there set about brewing the black coffee with which every true Louisianian begins the day. When the last drop of scalding water had been dripped slowly through the fragrant coffee, I filled two cups and carried them into the library.

Tomasine had barely wakened, and was sleepily rubbing her eyes open with her knuckles. Her nose wrinkled appreciatively at the aroma which accompanied my entrance.

"Good morning," I gave her deliberately cheerful greeting. She responded brightly, and took the cup I offered.

The piping coffee dispelled a measure of the fearful reality of the night just past, but it did not serve to lessen my determination that Tomasine should be sent back to the city. I broached the subject over my cup.

She, as I had half expected, refused to consider my proposal.

"There won't be any need for me to go back," she protested. "You have already said that there were ways in which to really kill those—things—haven't you?"

"Yes," I admitted, "granting the existence of such beings (which it seems that we, at least, certainly must do!), there are prescribed means of dealing with them."

"Well, then," Tomasine triumphantly made her point, "you will have to do it in the daytime, won't you? And you surely aren't going to wait a week!"

She had the right of it, at that. I admitted that I intended to do what must be done, that very day, and as quickly as possible.

"I am waiting only for Doctor Duplessis," I told her. "Folklore is a hobby of his, and his assistance will be valuable. His status as coroner, of course, makes his presence as a witness to what happens particularly desirable. Armand, unlike his wife, isn't even officially dead, you know."

Tomasine nodded understanding. "You can go with him as soon as he has looked at Andrew. He and I will be perfectly safe here during daylight."

There was plenty of time to pack her off to town later, if I failed to accomplish before nightfall what I planned to do. We agreed to let it go at that, for the time being, and went into the kitchen to fix breakfast while waiting for Duplessis.

The doctor drove up, and I admitted him, just as we had finished the meal.

Andrew had awakened and called to Tomasine, while the doctor was coming into the house. The youngster grinned weakly as I followed Duplessis into the room.

"How about some breakfast?" he demanded. "I don't have to starve, on top of everything else, do I?"

Duplessis, after examining his patient, expressed complete satisfaction with his condition, and told Tomasine she might give him the food he demanded.

8. *We Drive the First Stake.*

WHILE Tomasine busied herself with Andrew's breakfast, Duplessis casually led me aside. Without preamble, he plunged into the subject which was uppermost in both our minds.

"Judge Claybourne sneered at me," the doctor reminded, a shade of bitterness in his words, "when I hinted to him of certain fears I entertained, and which, in the light of last night's events, seem well grounded. I take it for granted you agree that we have to deal with creatures who

have no place in a normal world—in short, with vampires?"

"Twenty-four hours ago, I would have considered the existence of such creatures an impossibility. Today"—I spread my hands in a gesture of helplessness—"well, as you say, I have no choice except to admit that they do exist."

Duplessis nodded vigorously. "The beliefs that have come down to us out of mankind's dawn have, I believe, their roots always in fact. As we progressed through the ages, the more intelligent men gradually discarded what they came to call the superstitions of the ancients. The peasantry, keeping close to the primeval soil, have not become calloused to the promptings of *hereditary memory*. . . . *We* know they are right in believing in such things as werewolves, vampires, and other beings which are of the same host of evil!"

The chubby disciple of Hippocrates wagged a stubby finger before my nose.

"Now, Wynne, the point of all this is that, fortunately for us, the same legends which tell of the vampire also tell how he is to be dealt with. Do you follow me?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, rather inanely, I felt; "they have to be shot with silver bullets, or caught in their graves during daytime, and wooden stakes driven through their hearts to render them for ever harmless."

"Well," Duplessis indicated significantly, "we drive some stakes, do we not?"

"Yes," I exclaimed—"we drive some stakes! Let us be about it!"

"Good!" cried the doctor, smacking one fat fist into the palm of his other hand. "I have some sharpened stakes, that I brought along for the purpose, out there in my car." He hesitated a moment before adding, "They have been sprinkled with holy water that I obtained from Father Lavalle. I not only finally succeeded in convincing him of what he has until now refused to believe, but also obtained something else from the good priest—the giving of which, if the archbishop knew of it, would call forth the thunders of wrath from that outraged prelate. Our parish priest, if you understand me, was once a simple French peasant; the archbishop is an intellectual ascetic. Well!"

"What *is* it?" I demanded, with natural curiosity. Duplessis shook his head in refusal.

"That I have promised not to tell. I will say this much, however: It is something with which to—torture—the things which were Armand and his wife, either or both of them, into telling us what we must know before we can complete what we have to do."

My face must have expressed lack of understanding, for the doctor went on to explain: "You comprehend, do you not, that several children, mere babes, have disappeared since Helene de Brignac came to Bonne Chasse? And that she is suspected by most people hereabout of being responsible? In short, that the victims of the vampire themselves become vampires—and we must make her tell us the whereabouts of her victims, since they did not (as ordinarily would have been the case) gradually succumb in their homes to her secret visitations, and so be buried in places known to us? We must find those poor little babies!"

"How horrible!" I cried. "The others are bad enough, God knows, but *infant* vampires——"

The impressionable little doctor nodded wretchedly; his revulsion was not less than my own. He repeated my own earlier words:

"We drive some stakes, you and I. . . . Let us be about it!"

I called Tomasine from her brother's bedside; and without any details, told her

we were off to find the daytime resting-places of our visitors of the previous night, and kill for ever the terrors of Bonne Chasse.

"There is no danger—to you?" she whispered.

"None, not in the good daylight." I reassured her. I had seen something in her eyes that, as I went with Duplessis to his car, gave me the feeling that all the charnel horrors of earth and hell were things of little consequence.

DUPLESSIS threw his car into gear, and we set off in silence. Both of us knew where we were bound. Armand's wife—I wondered about Armand himself—naturally would lie in the de Brignac family plot in the cemetery of the parish church. This was our destination, and we were not long in arriving. Duplessis stopped the car on the roadside and we dismounted.

The doctor got an iron maul and stout wooden stakes from the rear of the coupé. The stakes were about two feet long and pointed on one end. To me he handed a small iron pinch-bar.

We entered the cemetery, which was set some distance back of the church, well off the road, and screened from view of the casual passer-by by a tall, thick hedge along an iron fence. The burial ground was tended by a part-time sexton, who was elsewhere just then. I suspected that Duplessis had connived with Father Lavalle to insure his absence. We found the grave we sought, unquestioned and unseen.

The cemetery was on fairly high land near the river, well drained, and here it had not been necessary to follow the practise generally observed in that region of lowlands, of interring the dead in tombs set above the level of the ground. The last mistress of Bonne Chasse had been laid in a place that, even without the aid of a terse inscription, we at once identified by the new and unweathered appearance of the thick flat slab and severe square headstone that marked it. There was something repellent in the very starkness of the smooth, dead-white marble.

Duplessis took the pinch-bar from my hand, placing it beneath the marble slab covering the grave. The slab was heavy, but it slid to one side with more ease than I had anticipated.

"Well," said the doctor, "now we dig." And dig we did. We dug great shovelfuls of earth from the oddly loose dirt that presumably covered Helene de Brignac, working in haste and piling a growing heap to one side. My shovel struck something that resisted its thrust. A few more scoops and a casket lay uncovered to our view.

Duplessis took a deep breath. We hesitated. After all, we had no enthusiasm in despoiling the grave of what it rightfully claimed. Then I think we realized, simultaneously, that we were there but to confirm the grave in its own, and that we had a task in which necessity, rather than our liking, played the principal part. Duplessis pried at the top of the casket. It came off, with the same unexpected ease that marked our shovelling of the dirt from the grave. I swore, and Duplessis made a sound that was like a woman's high-pitched scream. . . .

The body in Helene de Brignac's grave was not her own!

"Aunt Celie!" I whispered, between lips that grudged the words. Duplessis laughed, hysterically.

"Of a certainty," he cried. "Armand's wife forced *him*, before he finally died of her attentions, to prepare another resting-place for the two of them! Naturally! She foresaw that we would make this

visit, and so forestalled it. For the time being, it is checkmate."

"At least," I dismally suggested, "we can relieve poor old Celie——?"

"Yes," agreed the doctor, "at least we may do that much."

I motioned with my hand and turned away; Duplessis understood that I left the deed to him. From earliest memory, poor, faithful old Aunt Celie had held a place in my affections, and I had not the doctor's professional callousness. I walked farther away.

DUPLESSIS drove the stake. With the first sharp impact of his maul against the wood, there burst upon my ears an awful screaming, a crescendo of shrieking agony that ripped my taut nerves in shreds. Despite my inclination, I whirled and looked back. Of the turbulence and writhing agony, the livid hate and anguish within that grave at which I looked, I leave all unsaid but this. Duplessis, his swarthy, rotund face for once a putty gray, grimly mauled home the stake.

All at once the writhing, screaming thing lay still beneath the doctor's blows. The soft fingers of contentment smoothed hate and torment from the poor black face at our feet. For one brief instant it seemed that the old *Tante* Celie I had known and loved looked up at me, ineffable peace and a message of great thankfulness in the depths of her dim, tired eyes.

"It is finished," croaked Duplessis. He sprinkled a few clear drops from a small vial down upon the quiet figure. "Now, poor soul, go find that 'Land of Jordan' of which you loved so well to sing."

Tears rolled slowly down upon my cheeks as we shoveled back the earth and restored the violated grave. We were glad to leave that place.

Once, midway of our return to the house, Duplessis stopped the car. He took a pint flask from a door pocket, and passed it to me. "I think a little of that would help," he said, simply. I drank, as did he when I returned the flask. The sunshine, as much as the whisky, served as a stimulant that raised our spirits by the time we had come again to the house. We sat awhile in the car and talked.

"I'm afraid that you'll have to endure another night of it, Wynne," the doctor sighed. "Helene and Armand put old Celie in Helene's grave, in the hope, I assume, that they would have done away with us before we had time to accomplish what we have just come from doing. Where they have made their own den, where they have hidden their other victims—those poor little babes—we do not know. We must find that out, tonight—from them."

"Then Tomasine goes back to town," I asserted. Duplessis looked dubious.

"She ought to go," he agreed, "but I doubt that she will. Her brother should not be moved, and I do not believe she will go away and leave him here." He found the heart to chuckle, giving me a sly glance from the corners of his eyes. "It might be that she would refuse to leave anyway, even if he *could* go with her! Eh?"

"She's going, just the same," I rejoined, half angrily because of the flush I felt creeping upward to my ears.

But the doctor was right, as I found when we entered the house. Tomasine refused, pointblank, what she termed the desertion of Andrew.

"Then I'll send to the city for a dozen private policemen, and keep every light in the house burning all night," I promised, when I found that argument was useless.

"You can't do that," Duplessis objected. "It would only cause those fiends to

seek elsewhere for victims not so well prepared to receive them. We *want* them to come here, and fight on what is as much our ground as theirs. . . . You must remember that each new victim becomes a fresh recruit to the ranks of the menace we are fighting."

"We have only one gun," I warned, realizing the weight of his contention, "and but four of the silver bullets in it."

"I brought along three revolvers more," Duplessis promptly returned, "all loaded with silver, and a half-dozen extra bullets for your own. We fight, my boy, and I feel that we shall win."

"You're staying with us?" I asked.

"I'm staying," he affirmed quietly. "This is as much my fight as yours."

There was a heartening feel in the grip of his stubby fingers, when I instinctively extended him my own.

9. *Vampires Strike—and Tomasine Disappears*

THERE were not very many preparations we could make against the coming night, but the locksmith to whom Tomasine had telephoned came and fitted keys to the front and rear doors of the house, and to the other two that opened upon opposite sides of the veranda. At least, I thought, we no longer had to come and go through the basement window. This gave me another idea—that of securely nailing shut the one open lower window, and, as a further precaution, spiking all the others to prevent them being opened. I felt, when I had done it, that we were secure against attack from that quarter.

Later, after lunch, Duplessis advised spending the afternoon in sleep. The soundness of this suggestion was obvious; and Tomasine and I, in particular, were quick to follow it.

When we awoke, toward the close of day, we faced the coming of darkness with more confidence than exhaustion and jangling nerves would have permitted. Duplessis, who had not needed as much sleep as we, had attended Andrew regularly between short naps. He announced the boy to be even less seriously hurt than he had already believed, and able to withstand any nervous shock he might experience. The doctor went so far as to give him one of the four pistols we had, which Andrew fondled with grim satisfaction.

"One crack at that guy"—Andrew was never quite able to register the idea of vampires—"one crack with this thing is all I want!"

"I hate to disappoint you, old son," I told him, "but I've locked your window-blinds together to make sure you don't get it! What's more, I've either nailed or padlocked every other window, and all the outside doors except one. If we have any visitors tonight, they'll come in at the front door!"

"With a reception committee ready to greet them!" Duplessis grimly added.

The "reception committee," as the doctor put it, later settled down in the dim-lit entrance hall. Tomasine had found a large electric percolator, which she dubiously suggested pressing into service if we desired coffee during our vigil, without any of us leaving our posts. No self-respecting South Louisianian, of French or whatever extraction, will drink other than dripped coffee if he can help it; nor considers percolated coffee very much superior to the "boiled" variety—which few conceivable circumstances could force him to accept. I seconded Duplessis' prompt veto of Tomasine's proposal. We could do without the coffee.

THE night wore on. There was no sign of our expected visitors, and I began to wonder if our precautions had

not been so complete, and our guard so obvious, as to have made our quarry shun the trap. If so, we had utterly failed of our purpose. We could not stand watch every night; and if we could have, we but diverted a ravening evil to spread and increase itself in other quarters.

It is difficult to keep small talk alive, over a period of hours, in an atmosphere of tense expectancy. It must have been close to midnight when Tomasine eventually abandoned pretense and got a book from the library; but from the restless way she skipped back and forth through its pages, I doubt whether it occupied her mind as well as her slender fingers. Duplessis fidgeted and perspired, and smoked innumerable cigarettes that he rolled himself. It may have been the smoke that made my eyes smart and grow heavy; but I was fast becoming tired.

The thought of coffee recurred insistently. There is perhaps no other people, except the Arabs, with whom the beverage is so much a part of the ritual of living as those among whom I was born. On the warmest summer afternoon, as on the bleakest winter day, one drinks coffee if nothing else. To those unacquainted with the custom, this may seem a trivial thing. Yet, it was my wish for coffee that afforded the peril crouched behind our backs (while we fatuously awaited it at the front door!) opportunity to pounce upon us. . . . God grant I never place Tomasine in like jeopardy again!

The long, broad hall in which we sat ran entirely through the middle of the house. Curtains, hung from the ceiling and loosely caught back against the side walls, gave the long passage the semblance of division. From where I sat, I could see down its entire length, except that the far end was lost in shadow. It happened that I was staring vacantly beyond the curtains, when it seemed to me that there was dim movement in the murky reaches of the hall. As I dismissed what indifferent assumption told me was a trick of the shadows, it suddenly appeared that one of the loose curtains moved slightly, although there was no stir of air. I blinked my eyes and sat erect, only to observe that, as I had thought, the curtain was perfectly still.

"Can't we make some coffee?" I demanded. "My eyes are getting so tired they're playing tricks on me. When I stare at anything for long, it seems to move."

"I like the idea of coffee, myself," Duplessis approved, snubbing a cigarette.

We decided, after brief reflection, to leave the doctor on guard at the door, while I went with Tomasine to the kitchen. As we started down the hall, I half thought I heard a door opened, softly but in haste. I listened, alert at once, but there was no further noise. It had sounded like Andrew's door, but I could see, as we passed, that it was closed; and I refrained from opening it for fear of disturbing the youngster. The noise I heard—if, indeed, I heard a noise—could have been merely the racket of a mouse. I shrugged and followed Tomasine into the kitchen.

We made coffee, but it was never drunk. A high-pitched, startled cry rang through the house; the cup I was raising to my lips dropped unheeded from my hand. It was Andrew's voice!

"You stay here — where you'll be safest!" I snapped the command to Tomasine in tones that brooked no argument —and it would have been better had she disobeyed. I left her and rushed headlong to Andrew's door, from behind which his cries and panted curses mingled with shrill piping *gurgles* and low, evil laughter, to combine the noise of bedlam.

Duplessis, pistol in one outstretched hand, reached the door a leap ahead of

me, yanking it open without missing a stride. I charged through upon his heels. For one brief instant we stopped—staggered by the sight that met our eyes.

On the far side of Andrew's bed, crouched so low behind him that she must have been on her knees, Helen de Brignac—or what had been she—strove with him for possession of his gun. But the supreme abominations were the twin diminutive horrors — the more horrible *because* diminutive!—that swarmed over the coverlet and worried Andrew, crawling about his head, clawing at his eyes with evil, chubby little fingers. He spared an arm to fling them off, and they were back upon him in a flash. I felt sick and weak at the sight of those two round, tiny faces, still plastic in the mold of immaturity, but alight with lust and evil that was old when the world was young.

Helene secured the gun. Andrew had fallen back and lay still, faint from exertion and the pain of his wound. I think I laughed—insanely, if I *did* laugh—at the grotesque spectacle of the vampire turning to her own account the weapon designed for her undoing. The gun roared; I heard the bullet thud into the plaster of the wall behind me. Surely the world was mad when a vampire shot at men with silver bullets!

This thing that had been a woman crouched low behind Andrew, shielding herself with his body. Duplessis took careful aim, as coolly as though he were at target practise. As Helene leveled her gun for another and more careful shot, the doctor fired. The vampire screamed and fell backward, her weapon falling from her fingers to the bed. Duplessis leaped around toward her, drawing from his pocket what looked like an ordinary cigarette case. I seized the pistol from the bed, and flung aside the pair of tiny, vile things that worried Andrew. On the instant, they transferred their attack to me, and so engaged my attention in beating off their onslaught, astoundingly fierce and disproportionate to their size, that I was unable to assist or even attend Duplessis' struggle with Helene.

Those wretched infant horrors leaped about as if they were made of steel springs, swarming up my legs, clawing at my eyes, scratching, gouging. They hardly should have had teeth in their drooling little mouths, yet I repeatedly felt them bite. I flung them off, and they sprang back, leaping about until they seemed almost to fly. Their obscene little arms waved and beat the air, causing me an odd thought of wings—bat's wings—as they thrashed about. When I cast them off, they *floated* lightly to the floor.

Helene screamed. Like some tortured and stricken thing, she screamed in awful anguish. My vile little adversaries left me like a flash, throwing themselves upon Duplessis with fury and abandon. I had a moment in which to see the doctor, kneeling upon Helene's prostrate, writhing body, pinioning her to the floor with his knees and one hand. With the other hand he held the silver case against her breast. I could see Helene's dead-white flesh quiver and shrink from its touch. One of her arms was limp, shattered by the doctor's bullet; the other hand clawed agonizingly at Duplessis. Whatever the doctor's case held that Father Lavalle had given him, its touch was direst agony to his victim.

"Will you tell?" he grated, "will you tell me where you lie by day?—you and Armand?" Then the two mites of hell were upon him, and the vigor of the attack I had sustained was mere play compared to the insensate fury of their onslaught upon Duplessis. They took all of his attention. While he fought one from his face, the other pounced upon his

shoulder, biting fiercely at his fat, swarthy neck.

Blood streamed suddenly over the doctor's collar, and I quivered with horror at the avid sucking noises of the little monster clinging to his shoulder. Duplessis plucked it off, and calmly and dispassionately pistoled it through the head with cold precision. It went weakly limp, and the doctor dropped it to seize and mete like treatment to its mate. It, too, crumpled up, and Duplessis cast it down; so that they lay side by side in two small, broken heaps upon the floor. They were nothing, now, but two shattered babes, their poor little brains seeping out to stain the carpet.

I HAD scant leisure for pity, just then. Helene had seized her opportunity, and scrambling over Andrew to get past me, was making a frantic rush for the door. Instinctively I raised my hand that held the pistol, and fired full at her. Without thinking, I had aimed at her head, and I do not often miss. She fell, literally blown off her feet at short range.

"Now you've done it!" Duplessis cried. "I would have tortured her until she told where they have made themselves a grave to lie in during the day. Then"—he spread his hands in a characteristic gesture—"*then* I would have shot her. . . . Armand still remains, you know!"

"Yes," I blurted out, feeling a sudden uneasiness at the thought of Tomasine alone in the kitchen; "yes, Armand still remains——"

As if to justify my apprehension, there came the noise of something overturned and falling, from the direction of the kitchen, and a woman's cry, abruptly cut short.

"Tomasine!" I cried. Duplessis swore, staccato fashion, and I bolted from the room under the impetus. I raced the last few steps.

I knew, something told me, even as I ran, what I would find. The kitchen table was overturned, the coffee pot lay in scattered sections upon the floor, and coffee was spattered everywhere. Tomasine was gone!

"The front door!" Duplessis shouted, and we ran in that direction. One hand before me to fling it aside, I rushed at the screen door—and my hand ripped through the unyielding wire. The door was hooked—on the inside!

"I was sitting close to it, you know," Duplessis breathlessly recalled, "and dropped the hook when I got up and ran back to see what all the noise was."

"And every other door out of the house is both locked and nailed shut."

"Then she—and Armand—they are in the house!" the doctor exclaimed, with logical conviction. "Let us search, let us hurry!"

We ran through every room, switched on every light. There was no sign of Tomasine.

"The other doors are nailed, the front screen is latched on the inside." I sought desperately to reason things out. "The door from this floor to the basement is locked; the basement doors and windows are all nailed shut. . . ."

Some thought of my subconscious mind strove for comprehension. There was something that, could I but remember, would solve the puzzle, show us the way out—if I could grasp what it was that had clicked in the back of my head when I spoke of basement windows. . . . They were nailed shut, had all been locked, anyway. They were locked—*I had it, I had it!—One had not been locked,* before I nailed it shut!

"Duplessis!" I shouted. "The base-

ment—the window that was open when I came—to the basement, man!"

The doctor excitedly tried the door to the stairs, shrugging with despair when it proved fastened. I brushed him unceremoniously aside, jabbing its key into the lock. I explained as we leaped down the stairs:

"That was a duplicate key, they are all duplicates——"

"And Armand has the originals!" Duplessis excitedly supplied. "The storeroom, that is where we look, eh?"

I did not pause to answer, but he was right. It was to that rear part of the basement that I ran, to the partitioned space that made a storage room for all those odds and ends that every household ordinarily accumulates in the attic. I remembered that a great part of it was floored with heavy boards laid, unfastened, upon the earth. It would not be difficult to move them aside, to dig. . . .

10. Deliverance

THE door upon which I pushed was locked, and I had no key for it. It was a heavy door, and though the doctor and I threw our combined weight against it, the stout panels held. We wasted precious minutes vainly hunting for something heavy enough to use in battering our way in.

"Shoot through the lock," Duplessis urged. "If it should strike Tomasine, at least a bullet is cleaner than what she faces if we do not hurry."

I accepted his advice. Silently praying that Tomasine might not be in its way, I sent a bullet from the heavy gun crashing through the lock. The door still held, but with weakened grip that we broke with one mad lunge of our shoulders. I prayed, again, that we might be in time.

The place was dark. The shutters kept out whatever light the moon might have furnished, and this part of the basement was not wired for electricity. Duplessis, however, with that forethought which was a marked characteristic of his, had kept a small electric torch on his person since the beginning of our night's vigil. Tensed for instant action, we watched while the inadequate beam of light played over stacked boxes and old trunks, over broken furniture and debris that littered the floor and piled against the walls. The light seemed to hesitate of its own accord upon one corner, where a space some six or eight feet square was clear of storage. A miscellany of trunks and crates screened the floor in the corner from our view so effectively that their random disposal took on more than casual significance.

"There!" whispered Duplessis, pointing with his torch. I agreed.

"Move up," I told him, in the same low voice. "Keep your light on the floor, and I'll raise the loose planking."

We threaded through the crates in our way, and I stooped and tugged at a heavy cypress plank, rough-sawn to about two inches thick and twelve wide. The board turned over atop the one beside it, and I put my hand where it had been. I touched no earth, but my arm went downward to the elbow in empty space. There was, as we had expected, an excavation beneath the planks!

As I jerked my arm up, I thought there was a swift sound of movement beneath my feet, like the swish of a heavy knife cleaving the air. I could *feel* malevolence saturating that dank corner. I grasped another board and turned it aside. Now I could see below me, in the pit I had disclosed, the phosphorescent glare of twin points of feral light that blazed hate up at us. Duplessis saw, also, and swore breathlessly in a falsetto of excitement. We had our quarry holed, and there was no further need of silence.

"Throw off another board, Wynne, and shoot the dirty beast in its head!" Duplessis cried. "Throw off another board, so that I can find him with the light!"

I seized a third plank, almost to my undoing. The heavy lumber slipped in my grasp, and I jerked away my hand as a splinter of its rough surface stabbed beneath a finger nail. An arm, with a dead-white hand, flashed out of the pit. Something glittered in the light of Duplessis' torch, something bit wickedly into the plank where my hand and wrist had been. We had holed a snake that had fangs!

"He has a butcher knife from the kitchen!" the doctor shrilled. "Grab the planks at this end, where they rest on solid earth!"

I had been beforehand with the same thought, and was acting upon it even as he spoke. I heaved over two more of the planks with considerably more strain and effort, but in comparative safety—so I thought! Duplessis' light now picked out the monster in the pit: I saw a quick movement of his arm, and heard something streak past my ear as I crouched. Duplessis cried out, and the flashlight dropped and bounced into the yawning hole at our feet.

"He got my arm—not badly," the doctor snarled. Then, more brightly—"But perhaps now he is unarmed!"

THE hole was no more than three or four feet in depth, and the flashlight burned steadily on as it lay at the bottom. The feeble light dimly disclosed Tomasine, prone and still upon the earth. Just beyond her, in the farthest corner of the pit, was a crouched shadow, with two red, luminous eyes that burned up at us with hate and fear. I sensed that Duplessis raised his gun, and I hastily pushed aside his wrist.

"No, no!" I cried. "Don't shoot—the light is too bad, and you might hit Tomasine."

"I can hit him," the doctor obstinately insisted. "Get out of the way!"

The thing in the hole reached swiftly out of his corner, pulled Tomasine's limp form close, and held it before him in his arms. For the first time since we had run him to earth, the monster spoke:

"You can't shoot without hitting her! Go away—or let me go away, and I will agree never to bother any of you again. I wanted her, myself, but let me go, and I will give her back to you—she is unharmed."

I did not know what to do next, and I do not know what I growled in answer.

"You could wait until sunrise, and have me then," the horror gibed, "but you would not have your Tomasine!" His voice quivered with fury, and with hate that was more intense because it betrayed his awful fear. "Let me go, or you will need to drive no stake for Tomasine! My teeth are not as they once were, Wynne. They are long and pointed, and so *very* sharp! I would have bitten this soft, white neck so gently, so caressingly, and made her all my own. Let me go and I will give her up—let me go or I shall bite, not softly, but so deeply you will never need your cursed stakes for her!"

I saw a dim, ghostly white hand slide over Tomasine's throat in an obscene caress.

"This white, soft throat——" The whisper mourned as well as threatened, but the words fell wholly vile upon my ears. I went berserk.

Without being able to consider the possible consequences to Tomasine, I think I must have flung myself in a headlong dive toward the source of that foul whispering. I threw aside my gun as I leaped: I wanted to tear, to rend and

break, with only my bare hands. I seized another throat—a cold, waxen-clammy throat—between my hands, and I knew that my fingers had reached their mark before Tomasine was harmed.

We writhed and thrashed, that thing and I. How Tomasine escaped with no more bruises than she did sustain from our heels and flailing arms and elbows, is something that remains a mystery.

I found, again, as I had found when we had dueled the night before, that I was the weaker. I held on grimly, calling for Duplessis. I felt the fat little doctor tumble in with us, and thought he had gone mad when one groping hand—I knew it was his, because I felt its warmth and pudginess—threw a cloth over my head. It was his coat, and I thought, for one desperate instant, that the strain he had undergone had snapped his reason. I did not hear him tell me, then, and it was only later that I understood his wish to save me from the burn of the gun he pressed between me and my murderous antagonist.

The pistol roared. I felt Armand go limp, and I had to clutch him closer to keep from being overbalanced. For a brief moment, it was as if I held him in my arms. I am glad that it was so, gladder still that he was able to whisper:

"Good-bye, Wynne! You've done what I wanted you to do, when I wrote for you to come. . . . Thank God! Good-bye—and—forgive."

I think I sobbed. God knows I had hated the thing I fought, hated it through that time of horror since I had come back to Bonne Chasse; but that thing had not been Armand. I had played with Armand in our childhood years, fought beside him in the mud of France—it was he who came, amidst a sleet of shot and shell, and dragged me back, that time. . . . I am glad it was Duplessis who fired that last shot, glad that Armand could still whisper. For it was the old Armand, the Armand I had loved, who whispered and then lay still in my arms.

WE LEFT him, for the time, in the hole he had made for himself and that Helene who—I swore it!—should never lie again beside him. We had Tomasine to care for, and Andrew besides; and in Andrew's room there was a shambles that had to be considered. We carried Tomasine upstairs, and Duplessis forgot everything except his calling.

"She has only fainted," he said, at length. "Horror and fear were too much for her nerves. I doubt if she knows anything about that infernal hole we found her in——" He looked up at me, and I understood his thought.

"If she doesn't know now, she never shall!" I fervently assured him.

The doctor nodded, and left to see to Andrew. Tomasine opened her eyes. Returned terror crowded swiftly on her consciousness, but gave way when she realized that it was I who held her fingers in my own.

"It is over, Tomasine," I gently reassured her. "There is nothing more to fear."

Yes, it was over, and there is little more to tell. Duplessis drove off toward the river, after a while, with one bulky, white-wrapped burden, and another, much smaller, that might have been the two poor little things I had last seen upon the floor in Andrew's room. They were well tied, and I think they were weighted, although I have never asked Duplessis any questions.

Tomasine was not hurt, beyond a bruise or two, and she had no memory of what had happened, other than her fright when she was seized by Armand in the kitchen. Andrew had withstood his shock remark-

ably well, and his struggle with Helene had not, as we had feared, opened his wound.

There was one thing more we had to do. Armand's death had to be given logical explanation, and he himself had prepared the way for that. He must have planned to burn down the house above his self-made daylight hiding-place. I would never again want to live at Bonne Chasse, and his plan seemed the best way out.

We bundled Andrew carefully into the rear of his car, after moving it to a safe distance. Tomasine, Duplessis and I stood in the dawn watching the holocaust to which we had given Armand and his hall. We had spread a drum of kerosene through the house, and there were two drums of gasoline in the basement which had been arranged to explode shortly after we quit the place. The flames would be a roaring inferno before curious folk of the countryside inevitably gathered.

Duplessis spoke, as if he were explaining to no one in particular, or to any one who might want to know, exactly how the fire originated.

"The lights went out—a short circuit somewhere, probably. There was a drum of kerosene, and also two drums of gasoline, in the basement under the house. Our host, Mr. de Brignac, went down alone to get some kerosene to fill some lamps, taking a lighted candle with him. Shortly afterward the house was rocked by a tremendous explosion, and we were able only to leave the building in all haste. There was no possibility of reaching Mr. de Brignac, who was probably killed at the moment of the explosion.

"This should be a warning to others not to keep kerosene and gasoline under their houses—or, if they must do so, to stay away from it with lighted candles."

The doctor smoothed his tie with a chubby hand, and turned complacently to me:

"Sometimes it is a good thing for the coroner to be along, isn't it?"

I watched the flames without making answer. I had loved this place better than any other except my own old home that I had lost and the river had since taken. I would never have wanted to live there again, but I could not see the flames destroy it without a feeling of sadness. I expressed something of my thoughts to Tomasine. She put her fingers lightly on my arm, looked up into my face with eyes that were wistful and something more. She knew that she could be quite sure of herself.

"You'll never want to live down here, after this," she told me. "You will have Armand's money—you will take it because he wanted you to have it—and you can afford to live in town, anywhere you like." Her eyes dropped, at this point, and there was a faint flush upon her cheeks that was not altogether of the fire we watched. "There is an old house in town, in the Garden District, that was ours before it went like everything else. I love it, and I think that you——"

Not all the fires, coroners, nor thoughts of all the vampires in the world could have kept me from sweeping her into my arms. Vaguely, I was aware of a discreet but very complacent cough from Duplessis.

"Sometimes," he admitted, as if merely speaking aloud to himself, "sometimes I suppose it would be a good thing for the coroner to be somewhere else!" I heard him chuckling as he turned away.

It was not important to Tomasine and me whether he went or stayed. We had other things to think about.

The Fire Vampires

By DONALD WANDREI

Out of the sky struck a dread electric scourge that burned the life out of countless thousands and left charred skeletons to mark its passing

"Like light it hurtled down to fling coils of living fire around Norby."

THIS is a tale of war, and terror, and tyranny, and flaming death. It is a story that begins in the bleak abysses of space and ends upon the earth. It is the story of all mankind over a period of two decades. Yet it is also the story of one man, and one devil out of monstrous voids—but I anticipate.

I, Alyn Marsdale, venerable historian to the United Federation of Nations, have been deputed in this, the year of our Lord 2341, to chronicle the coming of the comet; but I can not set the facts down as dead history, for the very deeds burn before my eyes and the strangeness of it all lives again. No man now existing could tell this story and remain unmoved, nor can I, though my work lies with files that gather dust, and papers that brown with age.

I shall begin with the beginning—or as much of it as we are likely to know; and I shall unfold the events as they were unfolded to us who lived through the

disaster. As we look back now, with wisdom bought at the dearest sacrifice man has ever made, we wonder how we could have been so blind, could not have put together matters that were linked. But we did not, nor are we sure how much it would have helped if we had.

The new comet was discovered by Norby—Gustav Norby, the authority on cosmic life forms. Men had laughed at some of his speculations in the old days, but they do not laugh now. It was Norby who saw the comet on July 7, 2321. It was Norby who plotted its course and sent out the news that it would pass closer to earth than any heavenly body had ever come. It was Norby who predicted that there might be danger, that attendant phenomena would be widespread, that the very existence of earth was conceivably imperiled. And it was Norby who, by right of discovery, gave his name to the new comet.

When first seen, Norby's comet lay approximately five light-years beyond the solar system. At its estimated speed of fifty thousand miles per second, it would require about eighteen years to reach earth. Consequently, the prognostications of future danger weighed lightly on the public mind. Eighteen years? Why, that was too far ahead to worry about.

Astronomers watched the distant comet through all of July and part of August. It showed up clearly as a curved nucleus, with a fan-shaped tail streaming away millions upon millions of miles behind it. Aside from its phenomenal speed, it was noticeable chiefly for its faint coloring of reddish blue.

On August 10, as the new comet was nearing the region of Alpha Centauri, astronomers were electrified by its mysterious disappearance. Not the slightest trace of it remained. It was gone, vanished as though it had never been. The public jeered. Scientists looked puzzled as they tried to explain and could not.

On August 14, the world was stunned by the information that Norby's comet lay less than a billion miles beyond Pluto, and was approaching the sun at its former speed of fifty thousand miles per second! Within sixteen hours it would be passing the earth! Had it crossed more than four light-years of space in four days? Impossible! answered the wise men.

The world stared. Scientists everywhere were in a frenzy. It must be another comet. But how could any comet approach so close without having been observed?

At midnight of August 14 came the famous bulletin from Norby at the Mount Wilson observatory. It deserves to be quoted in full:

New comet is definitely Norby's comet, first observed on July 7. Speed again calculated to be fifty thousand miles per second. Reconstruction of theoretical path brings it to last point at which Norby's comet was seen on August 10. Only two possible explanations. One, faulty previous observation. Unacceptable because of number of independent observers and witnesses. Two, *comet suddenly increased its speed far beyond that of light and leaped across five light-years of space so fast that light-rays have not yet reached us and will not for years!* Hence mysterious apparent disappearance of comet. Comet was present but approaching so much faster than light that rays had not arrived. Intelligent control of comet by living organisms forecast. Its action otherwise unaccountable by any known laws.

(Signed) GUSTAV NORBY.

PLAINLY visible without the aid of glasses, the new comet drew the attention of anxious eyes wherever weather conditions permitted. Men felt uneasy or apprehensive. This could be no ordinary comet. Even its peculiar reddish-blue tint was different. Where primitive beliefs still survived in Africa and India and the jungles of South America, the coming of the comet was attended by a sort of wild hysteria. And in great metropolises, men could not look at the

newcomer without emotions of wonder and doubt and awe.

Hour by hour Norby's comet grew brighter, drew closer. It swung past Pluto, hurtling steadily toward the sun. Rapid calculations showed that it would come dangerously close to the earth. Its mass was not sufficient to disrupt the solar system, but there was the very gravest danger of collision, and the possibility that fatal gases would poison earth's atmosphere. By dawn, the comet was traversing the orbit of Neptune.

Radio broadcasts and television had spread the news, but the morning papers of August 15 sold like gold bricks, so eager was the public to read every shred of information about the menacing invader. Full-page headlines and flaring streamers told the story. The prophecies of disaster, the warnings of catastrophe, were printed. Norby sprang into instant fame. But what good was fame, men asked, if this were the end? Who could predict what would happen next?

A strange hush brooded over the great cities, throughout a sultry day. When the shadows of twilight darkened on the ground, men went out singly and in groups, by millions, to watch the newcomer. And long before darkness came, long before the first star shone, Norby's comet blazed forth bluish and brilliant, terribly near in the zenith, its tail sweeping fanwise in a majestic but awe-inspiring streamer of tremendous length. It was a marvel of the heavens, an omen, a prodigy that men compared to the Dark Star which had swept out of space in the Twentieth Century.

Would it wreck the earth? Would it plunge onward in its wild rush and crash flaming down upon a continent? Would it weld with the sun and cause who knew what disasters of collision or immeasurable heat? Humanity shivered at the terrifying and menacing beauty of the comet—so near, so dreadfully near, and so radiant that all the stars were outshone, and the moon gleamed wan and feeble.

A murmur of voices swelled along city streets; in the open country was heard the restless rustle of animals, the shrill whinny of frantic horses. Night turned to a kind of day. Gigantic and supernal, the comet visibly drew nearer, grew brighter, shining like a second and larger sun with a swath of splendor trailing away millions of miles behind it.

The murmur of humanity was hushed for a minute—then swelled to a babel as television and newspapers broadcast the latest bulletin from Norby:

> Unaccountable change in path of Norby's comet. At 10:41 p. m., W. S. T., comet turned at right angles from course toward earth. Estimated distance less than half a million miles. Present course in direction opposite that of earth's rotation. Too early to state whether it will become permanent satellite circling earth, or continue on a new trajectory and pass out of solar system. *No explanation for sudden deviation except control by rational beings.*
>
> NORBY.

As night raced westward around the world, so raced the intruder. America was lighted as if by a dim day; the comet shone reflected from the Pacific like a sunken volcanic fire; it swept across Asia while priests and fakirs knelt in supplication; nothing else within memory brought out such vast crowds in the capitals of Europe. Livid and flaming, it hurtled ever westward. The passengers on trans-Atlantic liners saw it flare up from the east and blaze high overhead. It followed darkness around the world, and when it reached America again, anxious eyes saw it burn above—*but farther away.*

At midnight it was very faint over the Mississippi valley. People on the western plains could hardly discern it. They were not disappointed, for they had seen Norby's latest communication:

Comet swinging away from earth after complete circling of globe. New path will carry it out of solar system toward region of Antares. Phenomenon inexplicable. Nothing in history of astronomy to parallel it. All danger past.

NORBY.

ON THE morning of August 16, two men were engaged in angry conversation at the Mount Wilson observatory. Gustav Norby wore a look of confidence. His young assistant, Hugh Arver, was alternately skeptical and irritated.

"It's preposterous!" he burst out. "Just because a comet acts as no comet ever has behaved you think that it is controlled by intelligent beings. Why, man can no more control his own world than—than I can wish myself onto Mars merely by wishing!"

"Perhaps man *will* control every movement of earth some day, Hugh," answered the older man quietly. "Remember, our civilization is only five thousand years old. And our scientific achievements are the product of only six or seven hundred years. There is no reason for thinking that our world alone contains life."

"That may be, but the surface temperature of the comet you yourself placed at about 1100° Centigrade. Why, nothing could live in such heat!"

"Nothing that we know could. But what of things that we do not know? How do you explain these?"

Norby picked up a pile of newspapers, telegrams, and radiograms. "Here are the accounts of more than *fifteen thousand* mysterious deaths last night from every country that lay under the path of the comet: America, the Philippines, China, Russia, Germany, France, Spain—a dozen others. Every death was exactly alike—a flash in the air like lightning, a man or woman who suddenly burst into flames as though by spontaneous combustion—and then, only a heap of bones. There are fifteen thousand instances of that fiery death already known, and the reports are still coming in. How do you account for them, Hugh? Does it not seem strange that they all occurred precisely when the comet arrived?"

"What if they did? Every one expected danger if it came too close. It might easily have loosed gases or energy that somehow struck down those thousands of people."

"Did you ever hear of a gas that picked one man out of a crowd, killed him, and left the others unharmed? Did you ever hear of lightning that drifted toward a man, suddenly shot around him, and consumed him instantly, and then drifted on again? No, no, Hugh, there was method behind this, method and purpose."

"What? Whose?"

Norby shrugged. "I don't know. Wait and see."

"The comet's gone. You can't prove anything."

"The comet is gone, as you say. But suppose it returns?"

Hugh stared for a minute. Then he brightened. "It won't in our lifetime. History does not record its previous appearance. The course it followed as it left would not bring it back again for nearly a thousand years, if at all."

"If it proceeded according to natural laws. But it didn't. It crossed nearly five light-years of space in four days. It turned at right angles to its trajectory and circled earth like a satellite. Then it shot off on a still different course. It behaved as one might imagine a space-ship from Mars would behave, increasing its speed to reach earth, circling earth to survey it, and then departing home, or continuing to other worlds—*after sampling the provisions of earth!*"

"Norby! You're mad!" came Hugh's startled cry.

"I am not sure. Can you offer a better explanation?"

Hugh was silent. He was skeptical—as every one else was skeptical. Yet he thought—as hundreds of other far-sighted individuals thought, trying to understand this riddle of the skies. The comet was the greatest news item of the year—of centuries. Its mysterious arrival and departure, the peculiar and terrifying death that slew thousands of human beings in its wake, the lightning that was not lightning, exerted a spell on the imagination and yet baffled the mind with facts that were not put together. Who could put them together? It seems so easy now, and yet——

ON ANOTHER hot August day, six years later, Norby and Hugh were descending from the observatory in early afternoon. They had taken dozens of photographs by the new 800-inch reflector the preceding night, and had spent the late morning in an examination of the pictures.

"That new telescope is certainly a marvel," Norby was saying. "Why, its range is dozens of times that which the old telescope had. And Pletzka's force-tube which creates a vacuum through earth's atmosphere does away with heat-waves and all the distortions which used to trouble astronomers. Why, they would never have been able to see that new star in the Antares cluster."

"It's strange that the star didn't appear in earlier photographs."

The two men had reached the outer door and emerged into daylight. A couple of workmen were passing some hundred yards distant.

"We ought to be getting a storm tonight," remarked Hugh after gazing at the sky. "There seems to be a lot of heat lightning around. Look at that fire-ball over by those trees."

Norby was already staring intently at the trees. A bluish striated light seemed to envelop them. Strictly speaking, it was not a fire-ball so much as a curiously motionless network of electricity.

"There's something unnatural about that lightning," said Norby. "I've never seen any—great God!"

The bluish network suddenly leaped across to the passing workmen and flung itself around them in coils of fire with two fingers of light crackling into each man's head.

A tortured shriek burst from them as from one man. An intenser flicker momentarily irradiated the network. There came two spurts of blinding, livid flame, two volumes of yellow smoke issuing up—and where the men had stood lay two calcined skeletons. For only an instant the odd lightning hung poised over the bones. Without warning it flashed toward Norby and Hugh. But the door to the observatory was sealed against it—some deep instinct had caused them to dash inside and fasten the door even as the lightning flashed.

Hugh's face was white. "Good heavens!" he gasped. "What was it? Why, that thing acted as if it were alive, like an animal springing after prey! Those men—I'll never forget them!"

Norby had a strained, queer look in his eyes as he answered, "I'm afraid you're right, Hugh, horribly right. An animal after prey——"

"But it can't be, it *can't* be! That was lightning!"

"Was it? Did you ever see lightning act like that? Have you forgotten——"

Recognition flashed into Hugh's eyes. "Norby's comet!"

"Yes. Do you recall the epidemic of deaths that occurred when the comet came

in '21? Thousands and thousands of them. And the reports—the deaths must have come about much in the same fashion as these two did. That comet has returned, Hugh, and I'm afraid for the worst. It departed toward Antares, you know, and last night we found——"

"A new star in the region of Antares!"

"Probably it was the comet. It may be within striking distance of the earth already—it must be!"

"What can we do? How can we escape if you are right?"

"We can do nothing but stay here so long as we are sealed in. The other deaths all occurred outdoors. I think we are safe for the present."

Throughout the afternoon they remained inside, yet they heard and saw the tragedy that swept its fantastic way around the world. Television brought them pictures of additional deaths. They heard the story of an electrical plague that seemed to have broken out everywhere. Hour by hour, the total of lives lost mounted. Men, women and children were stricken down in city streets, enveloped as they emerged from buildings, burned as they worked in fields, incinerated on the public highways and aboard ships at sea, slain even in aircraft. Nowhere on sea or land or in the sky was there safety. Every country in the world from Alaska to Antarctica, from Europe to Australia, reported the fiery death. Not a city of any size escaped the striated networks and the consuming bolts.

But it was at nightfall that the accumulating panic and terror swept to a climax. It was at nightfall, beginning along the Atlantic coast, and following darkness ever westward around the earth, that the incredible, monstrous, appalling truth flamed in the heavens in mile-high letters of fire.

Norby and Hugh heard the broadcast which announced that Norby's comet had again been sighted, moving across China. They heard in stunned incredulity the account of that new phenomenon which had also made its first appearance over China. But they could not believe, they would not believe, until the afternoon had worn away, and nightfall came.

Then they saw it—the comet streaking up from the east, brilliant and bluish-red and strange, with a corona haloing it and its tail fanning away behind in a vast curve.

They saw the striations and streaks of lightning that moved innumerably through the entire heavens, so that the stars were outshone and freaked by lines of fire, *lines that moved and formed themselves into letters, words, and a message, a mile high, miles long, shining in terrible flame against the darkness behind!*

Awed and speechless, Norby stared while a strained look settled on Hugh's face. They watched the message spell itself out—a message so simple, and yet of such stupendous import to mankind.

"People of earth," it began, "you are ours by right of conquest. Henceforth and for ever you belong to us, of Ktynga, known to you as Norby's comet.

"You can not fight us, nor defeat us, nor evade us. We are superior to you in every way.

"At irregular intervals we shall return and claim as our due from twenty to fifty thousand of your inhabitants.

"We desire nothing else. But we insist upon the payment, and we shall take it. If you resist, we shall take more.

"On our next visit, we shall claim John Hanby, the president of the Federated Nations; Axel Gruno, master scientist of the world; Tsin Lo Hoy, commander-in-chief of the international army; and Gustav Norby of the Mount Wilson observatory.

"These men must place themselves in the evening of August 27, 2332, at the peak of Mount Wilson. If they are not there, we shall take a hundred thousand lives instead of twenty.

"FTHAGGUA, LORD OF KTYNGA."

"WHAT can it mean?" gasped Hugh. "It's mad! It's unbelievable! You —Norby! Why should you be chosen? It's all a hoax!"

"Easy, Hugh," answered Norby to his excited assistant. "The danger is apparently over for the present—and we have a full five years to talk. It is not a hoax."

"For God's sake, what is it?"

The older man looked tired as he replied gently, "What I have long feared and warned the public about has happened —we are threatened by invaders from outside. This may mark the passing of mankind."

"Impossible! We'll fight!"

"With what?"

Hugh was silent.

Norby continued, "We can't even reach the comet. And how are we going to fight a wholly alien form of life of which we so far know virtually nothing?"

"If it *is* life."

"It is—and life of a vicious and frightening kind."

"It *must* be a hoax, it must be! How could the creatures have known English? What sort of thing could they be? Why, there's nothing on earth to account for them!"

"True, but you forget. The message we saw appeared in Spanish over Spain, French over France, Russian over Russia, and so on. Each country read the message in its own language. Was that a joke? It was a miraculously intelligent joke, if it was. Don't forget the earlier visit of the comet. I had a theory then that no one would accept. Briefly, Hugh, the comet is controlled by life of a sort with which we are unfamiliar, possessing knowledge and power far beyond ours. They are electrical things, pure energy that has an intelligence and reason.

"Somehow, they feed on human life, human energy. They killed thousands on their first visit. They sucked out life from living men. Vampires—Fire Vampires—that's what they are. And they sucked out knowledge, too, mind and soul and brain, so that they were able to study and master the nature of earth before they returned a second time.

"Don't ask me how they did it. I can only look at the results and guess. Somehow they feed on our life-force, spirit, energy, call it what you will. In so doing, they also absorb the entire knowledge of the victim. From the tens of thousands of people that they have now slain, they have obtained new energy for themselves, and a great cross-section if not virtually all the knowledge of earth. Man is doomed. Earth has been made into a slave-planet, owned by Fire Vampires.

"God knows where the comet's headed now—out toward its other slave-planets, I suppose, or to explore for new, inhabited worlds to subjugate. It's easy to see why they picked out Hanby and Gruno and Hoy: they are three leading minds of earth today, information that the Vampires could have sucked from almost any one of their victims. But it's also easy to see that they can not seek out and find specific victims; otherwise they would not have ordered these three individuals to be segregated in an isolated place."

"But why you, Norby? I can't understand that!"

"I think it's because they fear me. No one believed my theories and warnings, Hugh, but many people read them. The Fire Vampires probably reasoned that if I was several jumps ahead of the world in

knowing about them I might also find some means to thwart them. They could have waited while we four sacrifices were brought together, and claimed us now, but they must have had urgent reasons for departing, or else they are so confident of their power that they merely want our lives as a precaution, and can afford to wait a few years."

"What can be done? What is there to be done?"

"I don't know, Hugh, but I'm going to need you. We have five years—and a short enough time it is."

ON AUGUST 27, 2332, Norby stood again in the observatory. The intervening years had been crowded with labors and plans and projects that seemed to get nowhere. The immediate panic created by the comet had worn off the world by now, and a myriad explanations had been advanced to account for the phenomenon. The eve of its return was approaching, and excitement swelled along all the highways and cities of the world once more, excitement and uncertainty and fear.

Norby peered out from the protection of a heavy green curtain as if he were expecting some one. He looked ten years older, and a grim weight had taken its place on his shoulders. His hair was fast whitening. Wrinkles furrowed his face and forehead.

All at once his countenance brightened faintly. A few minutes later, Hugh rapped cautiously on the unused storeroom that concealed Norby. The scientist admitted him.

"Did you carry it through successfully?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes. I spread word that you had fallen into the river while on an outing with me, that you had failed to come up, that I could not reach you because of the steep banks, and that all points were to be watched for your body. I was detained several hours by the police for questioning, which delayed me, but finally released on my own recognizance."

"Good work! You are sure that my death is firmly implanted in every one's mind?"

"Yes. The television broadcasts have already gone out."

"Did you learn anything further?"

"Hanby, Hoy, and Gruno are on their way. They will be at the appointed spot by noon, without you, and firmly convinced of your death."

"If there were anything to gain, Hugh, I would be out there with them, but there isn't. In five years, the world hasn't been able to accomplish one definite thing toward repelling the Fire Vampires. If the deaths of those three men will save a needless waste of life, their martyrdom will not be wasted. The whole race is periled, Hugh, and no one man can think of himself first. But I have hopes. It's a long shot I'm taking, and if I lose, the blood of thousands will stain my hands, but if I win, the danger will be over. And your help is essential."

"You know you can count on me."

Hugh walked to the one window of their hiding-place and pulled back one edge of the curtain to peer outside. As he did so, it rolled up with a snap.

"Quick!" Norby shouted. "Pull it down again before some one see us!"

He was too late. Hugh jerked at the recalcitrant curtain, but a member of the staff passing by outside glanced up. Norby dived for a dark corner hoping he had not been seen—vain hope! A smile of recognition lighted the face of the man outside, a smile that turned to a writhe of agony as a whirling network of fire flung itself in rippling striations around him.

"They've come again!" gasped Hugh.

"And the damage is done," said Norby with a tight hardening of the lines around his mouth. "But don't blame yourself," he added as he saw the downcast look on Hugh's face. "I should have known better than to rely on those antiquated curtains."

How terribly right he was he found out as the day wore on. Twenty thousand lives if Norby, Gruno, Hoy, and Hanby were sacrificed; so the message had said. A hundred thousand if the instructions were not obeyed. By nightfall, the hundred thousand and countless more had perished in America alone. The whole fury of the Fire Vampires seemed concentrated on the country where one of their intended victims lived. And Norby knew that the Fire Vampires, in absorbing the life of the man who recognized him, had absorbed also his last impression: the figures of Hugh and himself in the storeroom.

Fate had beaten him, but he would not yet give in, not even when, after nightfall, he saw another message flame in the sky, a message that announced the next return of the creatures on July 17, 2339, and threatened the extinction of all human life on the North American continent unless Norby were sacrificed. He was requested to go on that day to the same spot where Gruno and his companions had met death.

Norby regarded the message with cold, murderous eyes. With a deadly calm he called Hugh to him, then, and they prepared for part of their work. They adjusted the giant reflector to follow the comet that now blazed triumphantly in the zenith. They released Pletzka's force-tube which created an 800-inch vacuum through the air-blanket above the telescope.

And when Norby finally looked at the comet, immeasurably magnified, and nearer by far than even the moon, he uttered a cry of surprize.

"Hugh! There's a vast structure of some sort on that white-hot surface!"

Together they stared. Dim through the aura of the comet gleamed its almost molten surface, and on it loomed a great darker spot, of fantastic architecture, dream-like, unreal, with curved angles and alien geometry of sinister beauty. But of other buildings there was no sign, and there was no trace of the Fire Vampires.

After long scrutiny, and after hundreds of photographs had been taken, Norby commented with a puzzled air, "There is something curious about this. I don't understand it. If only I could put things together!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Hugh.

"Why, there's only one building on the comet. It's as large as a city, of course, and could house many thousands of the Fire Vampires, but it seems strange. Again, isn't it rather odd that they would raid the earth and still leave no one behind, not even a guard?"

"Not so strange," said Hugh. "There may be a large number of the things still contained in the structure where of course we wouldn't be able to see them."

Norby shook his head doubtfully. Somewhere in these facts lay the weakness of the Fire Vampires, the weakness that they feared he would discover. But where? And for that matter, how could he tell, among the countless photographs of the Fire Vampires which had been taken in various parts of the world, which one was "Fthaggua, Lord of Ktynga?"

"I have it!" he suddenly shouted to Hugh. "I've found it!"

Hugh looked as if he thought his superior had gone mad under the strain. "Found what?" he queried.

"The weakness! All the Fire Vampires

are reddish—except Fthaggua, the blue one that we ourselves saw!"

"Well?"

But more than that Norby refused to divulge.

I MUST leave to others the story of the social and economic collapse that disorganized the world between 2332 and 2339. It is safe to say generally that civilization was plunged half-way toward the mire out of which it had so painfully risen. Most people came to regard the next arrival of the comet as doomsday. A sense of fatalism combined with a desire to extract every possible pleasure from the remaining years and created a prevailing chaos in which lawlessness, disorder, crime, and vice of every sort were universal. Scientists, it is true, worked feverishly in efforts to devise new weapons of destruction, to break down the atom, to control the laws of stellar mechanics, to invent space-transports which in a last resort might convey the population of earth to another planet. But the time was too short. Throughout the period, a tremendous exodus from America was under way, resulting in serious overpopulation of the nearest countries, and causing almost continual riots, struggles, and intermittent warfare.

Norby had plans—secret plans, partly because he was gambling on a long chance, partly because secrecy was imperative to his success, and partly because his life was constantly in danger. Branded as a coward and a traitor for not sacrificing himself with Gruno, Hanby, and Loy, accused of being directly responsible for a hundred thousand deaths, he found his work seriously hampered.

Somehow, with that indomitable courage that man achieves in his deepest despair, and despite the white hair which now hung above his haggard face, he carried on. There were rumors of blasting operations around Mount Wilson—but the entire mountain was now forbidden territory by governmental decree. There were trainload after trainload of apparatus that wound their way toward the observatory—long-needed repairs were being made, was the official word.

But all the crowded events of those years must be left for other hands to record. I pass to that fateful day of July 17, 2339.

"ARE you sure you have all the directions straight?" asked Norby anxiously, as he and Hugh stood on the peak of Mount Wilson.

"Yes," and Hugh briefly repeated them.

The white-haired man nodded, and they went to their stations.

In the former peak of Mount Wilson now lay a deep crater, as though a volcanic explosion had blown its tip off. The careful dynamiting and patient camouflage that were man-made had succeeded in creating an illusion of natural eruption. Near the center of this pit was what looked like a large, flat boulder, upon which Norby took his stand.

The walls of the crater rose almost sheer for five hundred feet, and were lined to the top with a series of irregular projections and ledges. Toward the biggest of these, at the base, Hugh made his way. An observer would have been startled to watch him apparently walk through the solid rock and disappear.

From the shadow and protection of a cavern, Hugh looked out at Norby, who stood impassively on the boulder. Behind him was a labyrinth of machinery, including enormous dynamos that droned with a dull rhythm. In front of him were several instruments, an electro-interferometer for detecting the electrical charge of the atmosphere within a radius of ten

miles and a "staggered" triple switch being the most important.

The hours crawled by. A hot sun beat down on the crater. The silent waiting wrought upon the tense nerves of both men. They felt the burden of this last attempt to defeat the Fire Vampires, felt it more because they were going so largely on deduction. One slip—and the human sacrifices, the living bait that was Norby—would meet flaming death. One error—and millions of human beings would perish as an entire continent was depopulated.

So the portentous day waned, and the sun drifted overhead and burned westward, and shadows crept out farther from the western walls of the crater and lengthened upon the jagged floor, and twilight approached. Still there had come no trace of the Fire Vampires. Into Hugh's thoughts came a hope.

Perhaps they would not come! Perhaps the comet had broken apart in the outer reaches of space—perhaps it had been defeated by a superior race somewhere in the cosmic voids—perhaps it had even put up a bluff and had never intended to return!

As darkness came on, Hugh's hope grew stronger. The strain of the day had been great, he felt very tired, and every passing minute meant an increasing chance of safety.

He glanced again at the mercury mirror that, beneath tons of rock, still reflected the heavens.

And there shone the comet, flashing into sight huge and brilliant, as though it had materialized out of nothing.

"Norby! It's come!" he shouted. His weariness dropped from him like magic.

He looked at the electro-interferometer. Its pointer was jumping and swinging madly.

Then he looked up across the crater and his heart skipped a beat. A vast mass of bluish lightning drifted ominously above the pit, as though suspicious, yet hungry for prey. In the darkness, Hugh could not make out Norby's reaction, and if the worst happened, he did not want to witness Norby's fate.

The sinister thing poised far above its victim, contracted — and like light hurtled downward to fling coils of living fire around Norby.

Hugh's hand, already resting on the staggered switch, threw it shut with a convulsive movement that brought three sharp staccato clicks.

At the first click, Norby dropped from sight through a trap-door while streamers of bluish energy ravened furiously where their prey had vanished.

At the second click, a solid sheet of fire shot across the upper rim of the crater, closing it completely with a roof of blazing incandescence.

The bluish Fire Vampire suddenly sensed danger and leaped upward—too late. Like a trapped animal, it halted at the solid flame that shut it in. A sound like a piercing cry, a noise like a hiss, emanated from it.

At the third click, from a hundred points on those jagged ledges shot a hundred roaring bolts of electricity—ten-million-volt streams that thundered and sputtered and crackled, crisscrossing the entire crater with a hell of surging power. In that mad and frightful glare, to the deafening crash of giant bolts, Fthaggua, the blue Fire Vampire, twisted in a frantic effort to escape. Only for an instant were its thrashings visible—only till that moment when the roaring electricity crackled through it, and there came a titanic flash as of a cosmic short-circuit, and a blackness of blackness followed.

And all over the world there swept a flash in the skies and a flame on the

ground, every Fire Vampire was seen to writhe in torment and disappear in a spurt of diffused incandescence.

THUS the Fire Vampires passed away —passed away for ever, leaving behind them only the comet that is now a satellite of earth, with an identical rotation period, so that every night it blazes above the eastern horizon and trails high across the heavens.

Before me, as I write, lies a communication from Norby, in answer to a request of mine. It seems most fitting to close this record by an extract from that missive.

"You ask me how the Fire Vampires were beaten," he replies. "I can only say that it was by guesswork and good fortune as much as by knowledge.

"Several facts that I had gathered impressed me. Why was there only *one* building on the comet? Why were there no guards left behind? Why were all the Fire Vampires *red* except one that was *blue?*

"A thought came to me—one of those guesses in the dark. The answer is, I said to myself, that the blue Vampire is Fthaggua, Lord of Ktynga. And there is only *one* Fire Vampire in all! Somehow, this monstrous ab-human entity grew up as a unit composed of individuals, a disconnected organism that nevertheless might die if its main member were killed. That main member, I reasoned, must be Fthaggua. All the red Fire Vampires were limbs, tentacles, parts, as it were, able to behave like separate individuals within a limited territory, but bound by invisible ties of energy to the parent.

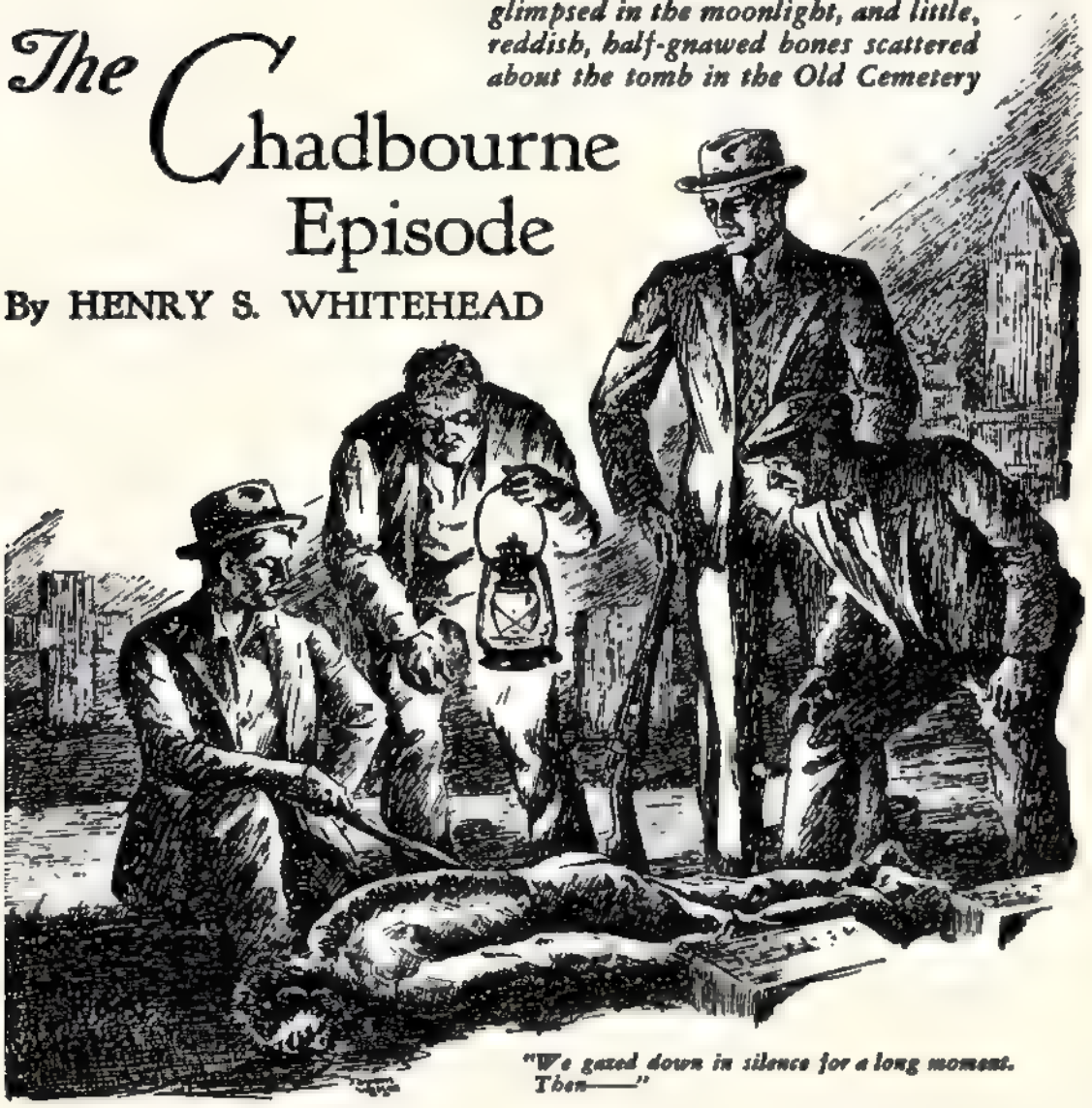
"If my speculations were true, then we would only need to destroy Fthaggua, and the other countless parts of this weird organism would of necessity likewise perish. And since the thing was pure energy, I reasoned that pure energy might short-circuit it, or diffuse it, "ground it," in the terms of earth-science. Together, Hugh and I worked out the details, concealing anodes and cathodes for carrying an enormous charge all around the crater. The results you know.

"The danger is past. Yet I can not help feeling a certain respect for an entity that almost made good its huge bluff, that almost succeeded in its pretense that there were millions of Fire Vampires when there was really only one—Fthaggua, Lord of Ktynga."

A shuddery graveyard tale of ghastly shapes glimpsed in the moonlight, and little, reddish, half-gnawed bones scattered about the tomb in the Old Cemetery

The Chadbourne Episode

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"We gazed down in silence for a long moment. Then——"

PERHAPS the most fortunate circumstance of the well-nigh incredible Chadbourne affair is that little Abby Chandler was not yet quite seven years of age on the evening when she came back home and told her mother her story about the old sow and the little pigs. It was July, and Abby with her big tin pail had been up on the high ridge near the Old Churchyard after low-bush blueberries. She had not even been especially frightened, her mother had said. That is what I mean by the fortunate aspect of it. Little Abby was altogether too young to be devastated, her sweet little soul permanently blasted, her mentality wrenched and twisted away from normality even by seeing with her round, China-blue eyes what she said she had seen up there on the steel hillside.

Little Abby had not noticed particularly the row of eight or nine pushing, squeaking, grunting little pigs at their early evening meal because her attention

Copyright, 1933, by Henry S. Whitehead.

had been entirely concentrated on the curious appearance, as it seemed to her, of the source of that meal. That old sow, little Abby had told her mother, had had "a lady's head. . . ."

There was, of course, a *raison d'être*—a solution—back of this reported marvel. That solution occurred to Mrs. Chandler almost at once. Abby must have heard something, in the course of her six and three-quarter years of life here in Chadbourne among the little town's permanent inhabitants, some old-wives' gossip, for choice, about "marked" people; whispered "cases" of people born with some strange anatomical characteristics of a domestic animal—freaks—or even farm animals "marked" with some human streak—a calf with a finger growing out of its left hind fetlock—things like that; animals quickly destroyed and buried out of sight. Such statements can be heard in many old New England rural settlements which have never wholly let go the oddments in tradition brought over from Cornwall and the West Country of Old England. Everybody has heard them.

Chadbourne would be no exception to anything like this. The old town lies nestling among the granite-bouldered ridges and dimpling hills of deep, rural, eastern Connecticut. In any such old New England town the older people talk much about all such affairs as Black Sabbaths, and Charmed Cattle, and Marked People.

All of that Mrs. Chandler knew and sensed in her blood and bones. She had been a Grantham before she had married Silas Chandler, and the Grantham family had been quietly shrinking and deteriorating for nine generations in Chadbourne along with the process of the old town's gradual dry-rotting, despite the efforts of such of the old-time gentry as may have survived in such places.

For gentry there are, deeply imbedded in New England, people who have never forgotten the meaning of the old *noblesse oblige*, people who have never allowed their fine sense of duty and obligation to lapse. In Chadbourne we had such a family, the Merritts; *Mayflower* passengers to Plymouth in the Massachusetts Colony in 1620; officers and trustees for generations of Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and of Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. We Canevins, Virginians, were not, of course, of this stock. My father, Alexander Canevin, had bought up an abandoned farm on a Chadbourne ridge-top about the time of the Spanish War. In that high air, among those rugged hills and to the intoxicating summer scents of bayberry-blossoms and sweet-fern—which the Connecticut farmers name appropriately, "hardhack"—I had sojourned summers since my early boyhood.

Tom Merritt and I had grown up together, and he, following the family tradition, had gone to Dartmouth, thence to the Harvard Medical School. At the time of little Abby's adventure he was serving his community well as the Chadbourne general practitioner. But for the four years previous to his coming back and settling down to this useful if humdrum professional career, Thomas Bradford Merritt, M. D., had been in the diplomatic service as a career consul, chiefly in Persia, where, before his attachment as a step up to our legation in Tehran, he had held consular posts at Jask, a town in the far south on the Gulf of Oman; at Kut-el-Amara in the west, just south of Baghdad; and finally at Shiraz, where he had collected some magnificent rugs.

The autumn before little Abby Chandler's blueberrying expedition Tom, who acted as my agent, had rented my Chadbourne farmhouse just as I was leaving

New York for my customary winter's sojourn in the West Indies. That my tenants were Persians had, it appeared, no connection at all with Tom's long residence in that land. They had been surprized, Tom told me, when they found out that the New England gentleman whose advertisement of my place they had answered from New York City was familiar with their country, had resided there, and even spoke its language passably.

In spite of this inducement to some sort of sociability, the Persian family, according to Tom, had comported themselves, toward him and everybody else in Chadbourne, with a high degree of reticence and reserve. The womenfolk had kept themselves altogether secluded, rarely leaving the house that winter. When they did venture forth they were always heavily muffled up—actually veiled, Tom thought—and only the edges, so to speak, of the mother and two daughters were ever to be observed by any inhabitant of Chadbourne curious to know how Persian ladies might look through the windows of Mr. Rustum Dadh's big limousine.

Besides the stout mother and the two stout, "yellowish-complected," sloe-eyed daughters, there was Mr. Rustum Dadh himself, and two servants. These were the chauffeur, a square-built, tight-lipped, rather grim-looking fellow, who made all his own repairs to the big car and drove wrapped up in a fur-lined livery overcoat; and a woman, presumably the wife of the chauffeur, who never appeared outside at all, even on Friday nights when there were movies in Chadbourne's Palace Opera House.

All that I knew about my tenants Tom Merritt told me. I never saw any of the Rustum Dadh family from first to last. I had, in fact, completely forgotten all about them until I arrived in Chadbourne the following June some time after their departure and learned from Tom the bare facts I have set out here.

ON A certain night in July that summer the Rustum Dadhs were farthest from my thoughts. It was nine o'clock, and I was sitting in the living-room reading. My telephone rang insistently. I laid down my book with a sigh at being interrupted. I found Thomas Bradford Merritt, M. D., on the other end of the wire.

"Come on down here as soon as you can, Gerald," said Tom without any preliminaries, and there was a certain unusual urgency in his voice.

"What's happened?" I inquired.

"It may be—ah—something in your line, so to speak," said Doctor Merritt; "something—well—out of the ordinary. Bring that Männlicher rifle of yours!"

"I'll be right down," said I, snapped up the receiver, got the Männlicher out of my case in the hall where it is in with my shotguns, and raced out to the garage. Here, of a certainty, was something quite strange and new for Chadbourne, where the nearest thing to anything like excitement from year's end to year's end would be an altercation between a couple of robins over a simultaneously discovered worm! "Bring your rifle!" On the way down to the village I did not try to imagine what could possibly lie behind such a summons—from conservative Tom Merritt. I concentrated upon my driving, down the winding country road from my rugged hilltop into town, speeding on the short stretches, easing around treacherous turns at great speed. . . .

I DASHED into Tom's house eight minutes after hanging up the receiver. There was a light, I had observed, in the

library as well as in the office, and I went straight in there and found Tom sitting on the edge of a stiff chair, plainly waiting for my arrival.

"Here I am," said I, and laid my rifle on the library table. Tom plunged into his story. . . .

"I'm tied up—a confinement case. They'll be calling me now any minute. Listen to this, Gerald—this is probably a new one on you—what I've got to tell you—even in the face of all the queer things you know—your West Indian experiences; *vodu;* all the rest of it; something *I* know, and—have always kept my mouth shut about! That is—if this is what I'm afraid it is. You'll have to take my word for it. I haven't lost my mind or anything of the sort—you'll probably think that if it turns out to be what I think it is—get this, now:

"Dan Curtiss' little boy, Truman, disappeared, late this afternoon, about sundown. Truman is five years old, a little fellow. He was last seen by some older kids coming back to town with berries, from the Ridge, about suppertime. Little Truman, they said, was 'with a lady', just outside the Old Cemetery.

"Two lambs and a calf have disappeared within the last week. Traced up there. A bone or two and a wisp of wool or so—the calf's ears, in different places, but both up there, and part of its tail; found 'em scattered around when they got up there to look.

"Some are saying 'a cattymaount'. Most of 'em say 'dogs'.

"But—it isn't dogs, Gerald. 'Sheep-killers' tear up their victims on the spot. They don't drag 'em three miles up a steep hill before they eat 'em. They run in a pack, too. Everybody knows that. Nothing like that has been seen—no pack, no evidences of a pack. Those lost animals have all disappeared singly—more evidence that it isn't 'dogs'. They've been taken up and, presumably, eaten, up on top of the Cemetery Ridge. Sheep-killing dogs don't take calves, either, and there's that calf to be accounted for. You see—I've been thinking it all out, pretty carefully. As for the catamount, well, catamounts don't, commonly, live—and eat—out in the open. A catamount would drag off a stolen animal far into the deep woods."

I nodded.

"I've heard something about animals disappearing; only the way I heard it was that it's been going on for quite a long time, and somewhat more intensively during the past month or so."

Tom Merritt nodded at that. "Right," said he. "It's been going on ever since those Persians left, Gerald. All the time they were here—six months it was—they always bought their house supply of meat and poultry alive, 'on the hoof.' Presumably they preferred to kill and dress their meat themselves. I don't know, for a fact, of course. Anyhow, that was one of the peculiarities of the 'foreigners up at the Canevin Place', and it got plenty of comment in the town, as you may well imagine. And—since they left—it hasn't been only lambs and calves. I know of at least four dogs. Cats, maybe, too! Nobody would keep much account of lost cats in Chadbourne."

This, somehow, surprized me. I had failed to hear about the dogs and possible cats.

"Dogs, too, eh?" I remarked.

Then Tom Merritt got up abruptly, off his stiff chair, and came over and stood close beside me and spoke low and intensively, and very convincingly, directly into my ear.

"And now—it's a child, Gerald. That's too much—for this, or any other decent town. You've never lived in Persia. I

have. I'm going to tell you in plain words what I think is going on. Try to believe me, Gerald. Literally, I mean. You've got to believe me—trust me—to do what you've got to do tonight because I can't come right now. It's going to be an ordeal for you. It would be for anybody. Listen to this, now:

"This situation only came to me, clearly, just before I called you up, Gerald. I'd been sitting here, after supper, tied up on this Grantham case—waiting for them to call me. It was little Truman Curtiss' disappearance that brought the thing to a head, of course. The whole town's buzzing with it, naturally. No such thing has ever happened here before. A child has always been perfectly safe in Chadbourne since they killed off the last Indian a hundred and fifty years ago. I hadn't seen the connection before. I've been worked to death for one thing. I naturally hadn't been very much steamed up about a few lambs and dogs dropping out of sight.

"That might mean a camp of tramps somewhere. But—tramps don't steal five-year-old kids. It isn't tramps that do kidnapping for ransom.

"It all fitted together as soon as I really put my mind on it. Those Rustum Dadhs and their unaccountable reticence—the live animals that went up to that house of yours all winter—what I'd heard, and even seen a glimpse of—out there in Kut and Shiraz—that grim-jawed, tight-lipped chauffeur of theirs, with the wife that nobody ever got a glimpse of—finally that story of little Abby Chandler——"

And the incredible remainder of what Doctor Thomas Merritt had to tell me was said literally in my ear, in a tense whisper, as though the teller were actually reluctant that the walls and chairs and books of that mellow old New England library should overhear the utterly monstrous thing he had to tell. . . .

I was shaken when he had finished. I looked long into my lifelong friend Tom Merritt's honest eyes as he stood before me when he had finished, his two firm, capable hands resting on my two shoulders. There was conviction, certainty, in his look. There was no slightest doubt in my mind but that he believed what he had been telling me. But—could he, or any one, by any possible chance, be right on the facts? Here, in Chadbourne, of all places on top of the globe!

"I've read about—them—in the *Arabian Nights,*" I managed to murmur.

Tom Merritt nodded decisively. "I've seen—two," he said, quietly. "Get going, Gerald," he added; "it's action from now on."

I stepped over to the table and picked up my rifle.

"And remember," he added, as we walked across the room to the door, "what I've told you about them. Shoot them down. Shoot to kill—if you see them. Don't hesitate. Don't wait. Don't—er—talk! No hesitation. That's the rule—in Persia. And remember how to prove it—*remember the marks!* You may have to prove it—to anybody who may be up there still, hunting for poor little Truman Curtiss."

The office telephone rang.

Doctor Merritt opened the library door and looked out into the wide hallway. Then he shouted in the direction of the kitchen.

"Answer it, Mehitabel. Tell 'em I've left. It'll be Seymour Grantham, for his wife." Then, to me: "There are two search-parties up there, Gerald."

And as we ran down the path from the front door to where our two cars were standing in the road I heard Doctor Merritt's elderly housekeeper at the

telephone explaining in her high, nasal twang of the born Yankee, imparting the information that the doctor was on his way to the agitated Grantham family.

I DROVE up to the old cemetery on the Ridge even faster than I had come down from my own hill fifteen minutes earlier that evening.

The late July moon, one night away from full, bathed the fragrant hills in her clear, serene light. Half-way up the hill road to the Ridge I passed one search-party returning. I encountered the other coming out of the cemetery gate as I stopped my steaming engine and set my brakes in front of the entrance. The three men of this party, armed with a lantern, a rifle, and two sizable clubs, gathered around me. The youngest, Jed Peters, was the first to speak. It was precisely in the spirit of Chadbourne that this first remark should have no direct reference to the pressing affair motivating all of us. Jed had pointed to my rifle, interest registered plainly in his heavy, honest countenance.

"Some weepon—thet-thar, I'd reckon, Mr. Canevin."

I have had a long experience with my Chadbourne neighbors.

"It's a Männlicher," said I, "what is called 'a weapon of precision'. It is accurate to the point of nicking the head off a pin up to about fourteen hundred yards."

These three fellows, one of them the uncle of the missing child, had discovered nothing. They turned back with me, however, without being asked. I could have excused them very gladly. After what Tom Merritt had told me, I should have preferred being left alone to deal with the situation unaided. There was no avoiding it, however. I suggested splitting up the party and had the satisfaction of seeing this suggestion put into effect. The three of them walked off slowly to the left while I waited, standing inside the cemetery gate, until I could just hear their voices.

Then I took up my stand with my back against the inside of the cemetery wall, directly opposite the big Merritt family mausoleum.

The strong moonlight made it stand out clearly. I leaned against the stone wall, my rifle cuddled in my arms, and waited. I made no attempt to watch the mausoleum continuously, but ranged with my eyes over the major portion of the cemetery, an area which, being only slightly shrubbed, and sloping upward gently from the entrance, was plainly visible. From time to time as I stood there, ready, I would catch a faint snatch of the continuous conversation going on among the three searchers, as they walked along on a long course which I had suggested to them, all the way around the cemetery, designed to cover territory which, in the local phraseology, ran "down through," "up across," and "over around." I had been waiting, and the three searchers had been meandering, for perhaps twenty minutes—the ancient town clock in the Congregational church tower had boomed ten about five minutes before—when I heard a soft, grating sound in the direction of the Merritt mausoleum. My eyes came back to it sharply.

There, directly before the now half-open bronze door, stood a strange, even a grotesque, figure. It was short, squat, thick-set. Upon it, I might say accurately, hung—as though pulled on in the most hurried and slack fashion imaginable—a coat and trousers. The moonlight showed it up clearly, and it was plain, even in such a light, that these two were the only garments in use. The

trousers hung slackly, bagging thickly over a pair of large bare feet. The coat, unbuttoned, sagged and slithered lopsidedly. The coat and trousers were the standardized, unmistakable, diagonal gray material of a chauffeur's livery. The head was bare and on it a heavy, bristle-like crop of unkempt hair stood out absurdly. The face was covered with an equally bristle-like growth, unshaven for a month by the appearance. About the tight-shut, menacing mouth which divided a pair of square, iron-like broad jaws, the facial hairs were merged or blended in what seemed from my viewpoint a kind of vague smear, as though the hair were there heavily matted.

From this sinister figure there then emerged a thick, guttural, repressed voice, as though the speaker were trying to express himself in words without opening his lips:

"Come—come he-ar. Come—I will show you what you look for."

Through my head went everything that Tom Merritt had whispered in my ear. This was my test—my test, with a very great deal at stake—of my trust in what he had said—in him—in the rightness of his information; and it had been information, based on his deduction, such as few men have had to decide upon. I said a brief prayer in that space of a few instants. I observed that the figure was slowly approaching me.

"Come," it repeated—*"come now—I show you—what you, a-seek—here."*

I pulled myself together. I placed my confidence, and my future, in Tom Merritt's hands.

I raised my Männlicher, took careful aim, pulled the trigger. I repeated the shot. Two sharp cracks rang out on that still summer air, and then I lowered the deadly little weapon and watched while the figure crumpled and sagged down, two little holes one beside the other in its forehead, from which a dark stain was spreading over the bristly face, matting it all together the way the region of the mouth had looked even before it lay quiet and crumpled up on the ground half-way between the mausoleum and where I stood.

I had done it. I had done what Tom Merritt had told me to do, ruthlessly, without any hesitation, the way, Tom had said, they did it in Persia around Tehran the capital, and Shiraz, and in Kut-el-Amara, and down south in Jask.

And then, having burned my bridges, and, for all I knew positively, made myself eligible for a noose at Wethersfield, I walked across to the mausoleum, and straight up to the opened bronze door, and looked inside.

A FRIGHTFUL smell—a smell like all the decayed meat in the world all together in one place—took me by the throat. A wave of quick nausea invaded me. But I stood my ground, and forced myself to envisage what was inside; and when I had seen, despite my short retchings and coughings I resolutely raised my Männlicher and shot and shot and shot at moving, scampering targets; shot again and again and again, until nothing moved inside there. I had seen, besides those moving targets, something else; some things that I will not attempt to describe beyond using the word 'fragments'. Poor little five-year-old Truman Curtiss who had last been seen just outside the cemetery gate "with a lady" would never climb that hill again, never pick any more blueberries in Chadbourne or any other place. . . .

I looked without regret on the shambles I had wrought within the old Merritt tomb. The Männlicher is a weapon of precision. . . .

I was brought to a sense of things going on outside the tomb by the sound of running feet, the insistent, clipping drawl of three excited voices asking questions. The three searchers, snapped out of their leisurely walk around the cemetery, and quite near by at the time my shooting had begun, had arrived on the scene of action.

"What's it all about, Mr. Canevin?"

"We heard ye a-shootin' away."

"Good Cripes! Gerald's shot a *man!*"

I blew the smoke out of the barrel of my Männlicher, withdrew the clip. I walked toward the group bending now over the crumpled figure on the ground half-way to the cemetery gate.

"Who's this man you shot, Gerald? Good Cripes! It's the fella that druv the car for them-there Persians. Good Cripes, Gerald—are ye crazy? You can't shoot down a man like that!"

"It's not a man," said I, coming up to them and looking down on the figure.

There was a joint explosion at that. I waited, standing quietly by, until they had exhausted themselves. They were, plainly, more concerned with what consequences I should have to suffer than with the fate of the chauffeur.

"You say it ain't no man! Are ye crazy, Gerald?"

"It's not a man," I repeated. "Reach down and press his jaws together so that he opens his mouth, and you'll see what I mean."

Then, as they naturally enough I suppose, hesitated to fill this order, I stooped down, pressed together the buccinator muscles in the middle of the broad, Mongol-like cheeks. The mouth came open, and thereat there was another chorus from the three. It was just as Tom Merritt had described it! The teeth were the teeth of one of the great carnivores, only flat, fang-like, like a shark's teeth. No mortal man ever wore such a set within his mouth, or ever needed such a set, the fangs of a tearer of flesh. . . .

"Roll him over," said I, "and loosen that coat so you can see his back."

To this task young Jed addressed himself.

"Good Cripes!" This from the Curtiss fellow, the lost child's uncle. Along the back, sewn thickly in the dark brown skin, ran a band of three-inch, coal-black bristles, longer and stiffer than those of any prize hog. We gazed down in silence for a long moment. Then:

"Come," said I, "and look inside the Merritt tomb—but—brace yourselves! It won't be any pleasant sight."

I turned, led the way, the others falling in behind me. Then, from young Jed Peters:

"You say this-here ain't no man—an' —I believe ye, Mr. Canevin! But—Cripes Almighty!—ef this'n hain't no man, what, a-God's Name, is it?"

"It is a ghoul," said I over my shoulder, "and inside the tomb there are ten more of them—the dam and nine whelps. And what is left of the poor little Curtiss child. . . ."

Looking into the mausoleum that second time, in cold blood, so to speak, was a tough experience even for me who had wrought that havoc in there. As for the others—Eli Curtiss, the oldest of the three, was very sick. Bert Blatchford buried his face in his arms against the door's lintel, and when I shook him by the shoulder in fear lest he collapse, the face he turned to me was blank and ghastly, and his ruddy cheeks had gone the color of lead.

Only young Jed Peters really stood up to it. He simply swore roundly, repeating his "Good Cripes!" over and over again—an articulate youth.

The whelps, with their flattish, human-

like faces and heads, equipped with those same punishing, overmuscled jaws like their sire's—like the jaws of a fighting bulldog—their short, thick legs and arms, and their narrow, bristly backs, resembled young pigs more nearly than human infants. All, being of one litter, were of about the same size; all were sickeningly bloody-mouthed from their recent feast. These things lay scattered about the large, circular, marble-walled chamber where they had dropped under the merciless impacts of my bullets.

Near the entrance lay sprawled the repulsive, heavy carcass of the dam, her dreadful, fanged mouth open, her sow-like double row of dugs uppermost, these dragged flaccid and purplish and horrible from the recent nursing of that lately-weaned litter. All these unearthly-looking carcasses were naked. The frightful stench still prevailed, still poured out through the open doorway. Heaps and mounds of nauseous offal cluttered the place.

It was young Jed who grasped first and most firmly my suggestion that these horrors be buried out of sight, that a curtain of silence should be drawn down tight by the four of us, fastened permanently against any utterance of the dreadful things we had seen that night. It was young Jed who organized the three into a digging party, who fetched the grave tools from the unfastened cemetery shed.

WE WORKED in a complete silence, as fast as we could. It was not until we were hastily throwing back the loose earth over what we had placed in the sizable pit we had made that the sound of a car's engine, coming up the hill, caused our first pause. We listened.

"It's Doctor Merritt's car," I said, somewhat relieved. I looked at my wrist-watch. It was a quarter past midnight.

To the four of us, leaning there on our spades, Doctor Merritt repeated something of the history of the Persian tombs, a little of what he had come to know of those mysterious, semi-mythical dwellers among the half-forgotten crypts of ancient burial-grounds, eaters of the dead, which yet preferred the bodies of the living, furtive shapes shot down when glimpsed—in ancient, mysterious Persia. . . .

I left my own car for the three fellows to get home in, young Jed promising to have it back in my garage later in the morning, and drove home with Doctor Merritt.

"There was another thing which I didn't take the time to tell you," said Tom, as we slipped down the winding hill road under the pouring moonlight. "That was that the Rustum Dadhs' servants were never seen to leave Chadbourne; although, of course, it was assumed that they had done so. The family went by train. I went down to the station to see them off and I found old Rustum Dadh even less communicative than usual.

" 'I suppose your man is driving your car down to New York,' I said. It had arrived, six months before, when they came to Chadbourne, with both the servants in it, and the inside all piled up with the family's belongings. The old boy merely grunted unintelligibly, in a way he had.

"That afternoon, when I went up to your place to see that everything was shipshape, there stood the car in the garage, empty. And, while I was wondering what had become of the chauffeur and his wife, and why they hadn't been sent off in the car the way they came, up drives Bartholomew Wade from his garage, and he has the car-key and a letter from Rustum Dadh with directions,

and a check for ten dollars and his car-fare back from New York. His instructions were to drive the car to New York and leave it there. He did so that afternoon."

"What was the New York address?" I inquired. "That might take some looking into, if you think——"

"I don't know what to think—about Rustum Dadh's connection with it all, Gerald," said Tom. "The address was merely the Cunard Line Docks. Whether Rustum Dadh and his family were—the same—there's simply no telling. There's the evidence of the live animals sent up to the house. That live meat may have been for the chauffeur and his wife—seems unlikely, somehow. There was a rumor around town about some dispute or argument between the old man and his chauffeur, over their leaving all together—just a rumor, something picked up or overheard by some busybody. You can take that for what it's worth, of course. The two of 'em, desirous to break away from civilization, revert, here in Chadbourne—that, I imagine, is the probability. There are many times the number of people below ground in the three old cemeteries than going about their affairs—and other people's!—here in Chadbourne. But, whatever Rustum Dadh's connection with—what we know—whatever share of guilt rests on him—he's gone, Gerald, and we can make any one of the three or four possible guesses; but it won't get us anywhere." Then, a little weariness showing in his voice, for Tom Merritt, too, had had a pretty strenuous evening, he added:

"I hired young Jed Peters to spend tomorrow cleaning out the old tomb-house of the ancestors!"

I CLEANED my rifle before turning in that night. When I had got this job done and had taken a boiling-hot shower-bath, it was close to two o'clock a. m. before I rolled in between the sheets. I had been dreading a sleepless night with the edge of my mind, after that experience up there on the Old Cemetery Ridge. I lay in bed for a while, wakeful, going over snatches of it in my mind. Young Jed! No deterioration there at any rate. There was a fellow who would stand by you in a pinch. The old yeoman stock had not run down appreciably in young Jed.

I fell asleep at last after assuring myself all over again that I had done a thorough job up there on the hill. Ghouls! Not merely *Arabian Nights* creatures, like the Afreets and the Djinn. No. Real—those jaws! They shot them down, on sight, over there in Persia when they were descried coming out of their holes among the old tomb-places. . . .

Little, reddish, half-gnawed bones, scattered about that fetid shambles—little bones that had never been torn out of the bodies of calves or lambs—little bones that had been——

I wonder if I shall ever be able to forget those little bones, those little, pitiful bones. . . .

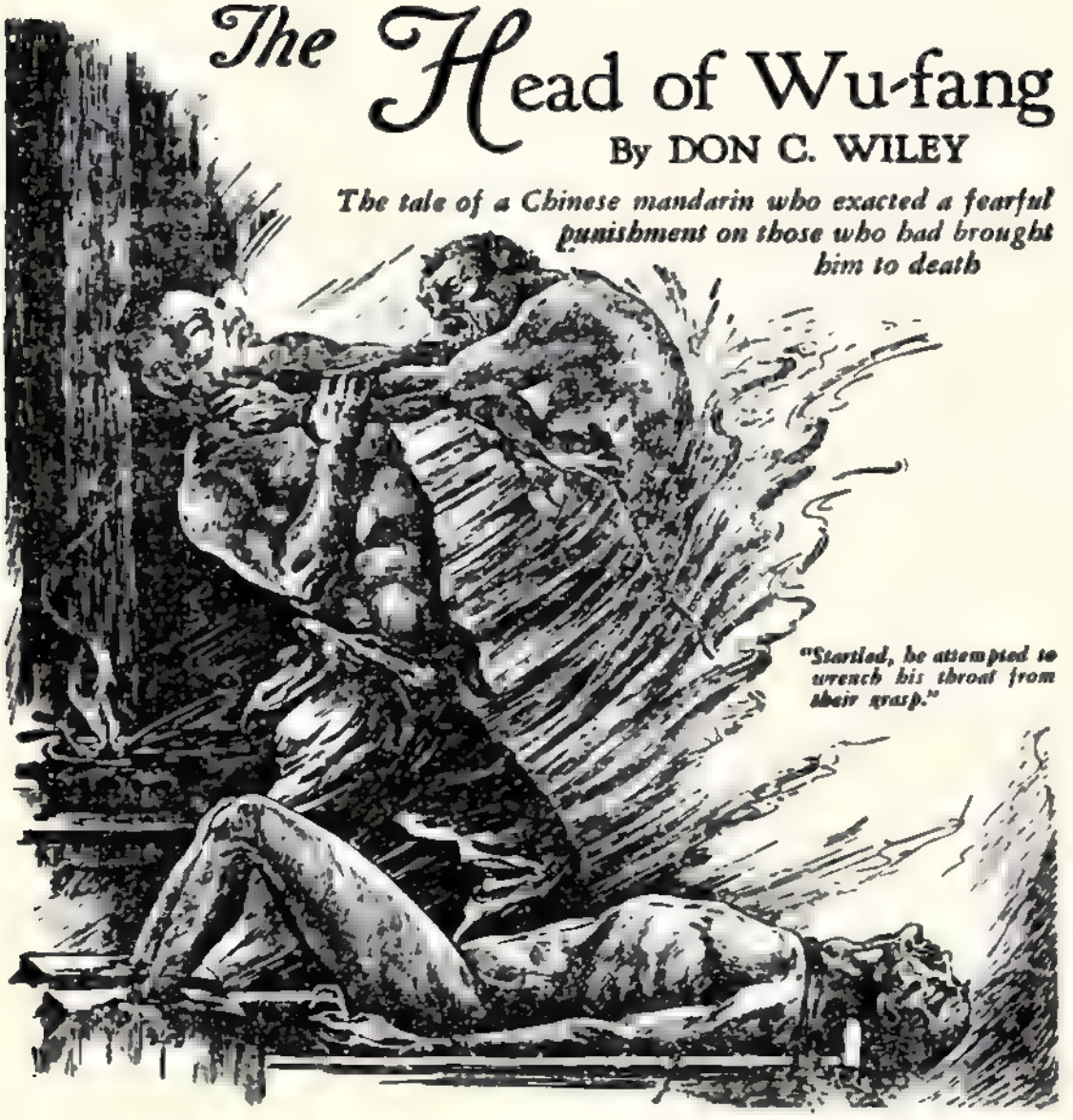
I AWOKE to the purr of an automobile engine in second speed, coming up the steep hill to my farmhouse, and it was a glorious late-summer New England morning. Young Jed Peters was arriving with my returned car.

I jumped out of bed, pulled on a bath-robe, stepped into a pair of slippers. It was seven-thirty. I went out to the garage and brought young Jed back inside with me for a cup of coffee. It started that new day propitiously to see the boy eat three fried eggs and seven pieces of breakfast bacon. . . .

The Head of Wu-fang

By DON C. WILEY

The tale of a Chinese mandarin who exacted a fearful punishment on those who had brought him to death



"Startled, he attempted to wrench his throat from their grasp."

WHEN my good friend and spiritual adviser, the Reverend Josiah Davis, died suddenly of some mysterious malady contracted among the fever wards of his mission hospital at Kalgan, in northern China, certain of his private papers fell into my hands. Scanning them idly one night, while the winds that howl down the Gobi desert wailed around my little house like souls in torment, I came upon a thick document, neatly bound, but yellow with age. On its cover was inscribed in Josiah's angular hand this legend: "Dying statement of the Christian convert Ching Tung-li taken down and translated by Josiah Davis, Kalgan, China, December 3, 19—".

Overcome by curiosity I turned back the cover and began reading.

An hour later I shuddered as I thumbed the last page. For many minutes I debated whether it would not be wise to consign the papers to the fire

which flickered on the hearth at my feet; for the story of the head of Mandarin Wu-fang and the curse which it put upon three men was so incredible, so horrible, so beyond the pale of things as they are that were it not for my knowledge of the essential honesty and level-headedness of Josiah Davis I would have ascribed the tale to the ravings of a madman.

However, the world may judge for itself as to the truth of the strange story of Ching Tung-li, for I give it in its entirety:

As you know, Father, I came to your Mission two years ago a man broken in body and with my mind tottering on the verge of madness. You took me in, fed me and taught me that the creed of the Christian God is kindness and love. Also you taught me that confession and repentance are great virtues. Now that I am dying I wish to confess and to repent. A little water, please, to moisten my lips, and I will tell you my story. There is nothing of kindness and love in it but much of hate and lust, pain and horror, and it is probable that you will believe little of it. But I, as I die, *know* that it is true, for even now I see the head of Wu-fang grinning at me out of the darkness. The lips are moving. . . .

You, I know, think me an old, old man, but I am really only forty, as we Chinese count our age. True, my body is bent and my voice is weak like that of a grandfather, but that is only because of the hell in which I have lived and the tortures which this poor body of mine has undergone.

I was born in the village of Minga, which lies far to the north of Kalgan on the edge of the great area that you foreigners call Inner Mongolia. I must confess that my youth was an evil one. I drank and stole and consorted with loose women, though my father was one of the most respected men in the village. My constant companion and my evil spirit in these revels was a great, hulking fellow named Wong, the son of a petty tea-shop owner. For him I had the greatest admiration. He was always first in proposing some deviltry and his great strength made him feared for many *li* around our village. Him I followed slavishly.

For many years peace had blessed our village, but one autumn we saw smoke rolling up on the horizon and later a fear-stricken refugee from a neighboring town crept into Minga and told us that Chang-Tsu, the notorious bandit leader, was sweeping across the country, looting villages and towns and putting their inhabitants to the sword.

Then, while our elders were still debating methods of defense, Chang was upon us. Into our village he rode, a great grinning devil at the head of a hundred lesser devils who seized our women and looted our shops as they strode through the streets. Stalking into our temple, Chang ordered the village elders brought before him, and when they came he laughed at their pleas for mercy. Then with his own sword he cut the throat of the leading elder, holding him while he bled like a slaughtered pig. Chang growled an order to his men. In a moment the temple was a shambles. Every one of our leading citizens lay dying, my father among them.

For the next three days we lived in a smoky hell. Bodies littered the streets and women screamed in the drunken embraces of the bandits. Yet, strange as it seemed to me, my evil companion Wong went unscathed, nor was I injured. Then I learned the reason. Wong confided to me that he had approached Chang with the offer that the two of us

join his forces and that the offer had been accepted.

My father's body lay still on the blood-stained floor of the temple; my mother had died horribly in our burning home, and I had seen my own sister fling herself into a well to escape the clutches of one of Chang's drunken followers. It was far better that I, too, should die in the village in which I was born, but so strong was the hold that Wong had upon my soul that I accepted—nay, welcomed—his infamous proposal, and we left the village in the vanguard of Chang's band.

OF THE next few years I do not care to talk, for they were the blackest of my life. Let it suffice that Chang and his men swept across northern Chihli and into Manchuria like a scourge, murdering, plundering and burning, and that Wong came to the fore among the band of murderers by his signal acts of brutality until he was promoted to the post of executioner and became Chang's favorite. I followed Wong, rising with him. It was I who bound the victims and forced them to kneel so that their necks might feel the biting caress of his great headsman's sword. And often I aided him when some stubborn enemy was put to the torture. There were many of these. Now, as I grow weaker, I can hear their screams again. Ah, many, many tortured spirits will meet and mock mine when the great blackness closes over me.

The more he killed and plundered the more powerful Chang became, until he was master over many hundred miles of territory. Yet, desperately as he tried, one city still held out against him. This was the walled city of Chufung, and its overlord was an aged mandarin named Wu-fang. Whisper that name softly, Father, for it is a terrible one.

Now, bandit Chang was afraid of but one thing—death. And for that reason he was determined to conquer Chufung, for strange tales were told of the powers of its mandarin commander. Men said that nightly he held converse with the *cheous*—the devils of ancient China—and that he had learned the secret of everlasting life. None knew how old he was, although men's fathers could not remember the day when he was not their leader. Many were ready to swear that on a certain day when the plague that turned men's bodies black swept through Chufung, they had seen a dead coolie carried into old Wu-fang's palace. Next day the dead man walked from the place, well and sound of body, though his mind for ever after was a blank.

Wu-fang was rumored to be immensely rich, but that interested Chang less than did this secret of life, which our leader swore he would wrest from the old man. And so, when one of our spies came to Chang one day with a scheme by which we could win our way into Chufung, our leader ordered that we quit the town which then we were plundering and ride away to the mandarin stronghold, though it was many weary miles distant.

THE people of Chufung displayed a stubborn resistance, but our spy's scheme proved successful, and on the second day of the siege, Chang rode at the head of his men into the city through streets littered with the bodies of men and women, and finally he halted at the palace of the mandarin Wu-fang.

The rest of my story I hardly dare ask you to believe, but by the Christian God, in whom I now believe, the curse that the head of that ancient man put upon three strong and heartless men was powerful enough to drive them to their death. Chang Tsu is dead and he was the first

of the three. Wong is dead and he was the second. I am the third and you can see that I am dying.

As I said, Chang rode to the gates of Wu-fang's palace. Wong and I rode with the crowd of bandits at his heels. In a moment the men had smashed the bars and the great gates swung open. There, across the courtyard, Wu-fang stood in a portico richly decorated with gold and lacquer. He was an old, old man in silken robes and a scarlet cap bearing the jade button of the mandarin. Around him were clustered dark, crouching figures. They seemed human and yet were not completely human. Deep shadows lay in the portico and we could see their eyes shining as no human eyes have ever shone.

At the sight of these guardians Wong and I drew our pistols, but the old mandarin only laughed contemptuously. Then he waved a hand and the figures were gone. No, they did not slink back into the palace. He simply waved his hand—and they were not.

But, by my soul, we saw them again —and soon!

At this weird disappearance Chang halted for a moment and I saw him bite his lip. Then he stalked forward, as arrogant as ever, and reaching the old man struck him full in the face with the heel of his hand.

Wong and I caught the mandarin as he tottered back from the blow and together we dragged him through the palace door and into a room that for richness and beauty rivalled any in the Winter Palace in Peiping. Everywhere were carved screens and teakwood chairs and tables inlaid with the finest jade, and on the walls hung silken tapestries worth an emperor's ransom.

Rich was the loot in that room, but we paid little heed to it, for again we saw those weirdly shining eyes, glaring at us from the corners which were shrouded in darkness. Yet once more they vanished in an instant when the mandarin made a motion with a half-freed arm.

Now, Chang Tsu was not one to be deterred by man or devil, so he flung himself down in a great chair, placed his muddied boots on a priceless rug and ordered that we drag the prisoner before him.

"Old man," Chang growled, "you know me and my ways. Therefore you dare not refuse what I am about to demand. You are the possessor of certain secrets, among them that of everlasting life. These secrets I must know. Tell me and you shall go free. Refuse and you will die most slowly. This man," pointing to Wong, "has his ways of making men talk and making men die that make even me shudder, and he shall have his way with you unless you speak."

The mandarin seemed to ponder for a moment, and then he laughed. Even today I do not like to think of that laugh. Never have I heard such a sound of utter contempt issue from a human throat. There was black evil in that laugh, and more knowledge than any man should have.

"No," the old man cackled, "my secrets are for wise men. You are a fool and would misuse them. Further, you are greedy; and those I serve, and who serve me, hate greed. They would destroy you, but not before you had done much harm. For many years I have ruled the people of this city and ruled them well. Now I am ready to die, and if you think that the manner in which I die can make any difference you are a greater fool than I thought."

Stepping forward he spat full in Chang's face.

For a full moment our leader stared unbelievingly at the mandarin. Then with a bellow of rage he leaped from the chair and knocked down the old man with one blow and began to kick him unmercifully. So savage was his attack that I believe he would have killed Wu-fang then and there had not remembrance of the secrets the old man knew intervened.

When the mandarin fell, I heard a low muttering sound that seemed to sweep round the room, and once more I saw those awful figures materializing out of the gloom. But they vanished as Chang ceased his attack and dragged his enemy to his feet.

Now Chang had sworn that Wu-fang should tell his secrets; so when he turned the ancient mandarin over to our care he growled certain explicit instructions as to the treatment the prisoner should receive at our hands.

I SHALL speak but briefly of that treatment. Through it all, though we plucked out his long nails one at a time, applied white-hot irons to his feet and armpits and with a knife tortured certain nerve centers in a way which only Wong knew, the old man opened his mouth only once. Of that I shall tell you.

Early on the second day of the mandarin's ordeal, as I was aiding Wong in applying a hot iron to our victim's body, I felt soft, clammy hands creeping about my throat. These hands were horrible. They seemed to be reaching from beyond the grave. Startled, I attempted to wrench my throat from their grasp. I felt a strange paralysis creeping over me. The hands tightened and before my gaze swam a face so horrible that I can not attempt to describe it. Dimly I saw that Wong seemed to be trapped by the same mysterious power.

It was then that Wu-fang spoke, and his voice seemed far too powerful for a body tortured as his had been.

"Not yet," he said, and it seemed to be an order. "I am ready to die. Your task will come later. Begone!"

At the last word the hands relaxed and the breath of life came back into my body again.

I need not tell you that the horror of that experience was strong upon us, and had it not been for our fear of Chang, Wong and I would not have remained another instant in that dark chamber where the mandarin lay. But Chang had ordered that the old man be made to speak; so the torture went on.

On the third day it became apparent that our efforts would prove fruitless, that Wu-fang would die without opening his lips. Chang, when he realized this, was mad with rage. He was determined, however, that his victim should not cheat him of a final indignity—public and shameless execution.

Bending over the wasted body in the torture chamber he shouted, "Old fool, you have defied me and you shall die tomorrow on the public execution ground. No mandarin's death for you—no silken bow-string or swift poison! Tomorrow, unless you speak at once, you shall die like a common criminal under my headsman's sword."

There was no movement to show that the mandarin heard the threat, but I could see that his eyes were open and that he glared balefully at our leader. However, he made no sound, and Chang, stamping with rage, set the hour of execution and ordered that a dozen of the city's elders be killed at the same time.

NEVER shall I forget that day when we led the old man out to die. The sun blazed down on the barren

execution ground outside the city wall. The field was dotted with bodies and the dust was caked with the blood of a dozen sprawling, headless forms.

In the center stood Chang, smiling viciously at the scene of horror. Surrounding him were his picked riflemen, and near by Wong leaned upon his great blood-stained headsman's sword. The sweat trickled down his face, and his huge body, bare to the waist, glistened in the sun, for he had beheaded twelve men in less than an hour that morning.

Then from the people of the city, who crowded against the low wall around the place of execution, came a wail of sorrow and terror as a squad of our men led in the old mandarin. I say led, but rather they dragged him; for the tortures he had undergone were so great that his tottering legs could not support his body. Yet on his wrinkled face was a look, not of terror, but of hatred so fierce that we all gasped with fear. Even Chang's face blanched with terror.

The soldiers, who supported the old man, dragged him before executioner Wong and let him fall to his knees. Then, as Wong began to raise the great sword, an aged woman broke from the crowd, ran out on the field and screamed, "Touch him not, as you value your lives! He deals with the devils of the earth and the air, and so surely as you kill him he will return and——"

Here a shot from the rifle of one of Chang's guards cut short the warning, and the hag, a bullet through her forehead, slumped to the ground.

The interruption seemed to have brought back Chang's courage, for he stepped forward and with an evil smile on his face stood, legs straddled, before the man who was about to die.

"Old fool," he snarled, "I fear not your devils and curses, for I am Chang, a devil far worse than any with whom you have treated. Now go to your ancestors, you dog!"

With the words Wong lifted his sword high in the air and brought it down with a mighty stroke.

I saw the blade strike the old man's neck and shear through it. I saw the head leap under the blade and fall to the ground a yard away, while great gouts of blood spurted from the severed neck.

And then a shadow like that of a great black wing swept swiftly across the sun, leaving the execution field bathed in an eery half-life. With the coming of the shadow the eyes in the severed head opened slowly and glared balefully at the man who had ordered the execution.

Came next a thin, piping voice from the awful Thing on the ground. The lips, drawn back from the sharp yellow teeth, did not move, yet the voice issued from between them. I could hear the voice distinctly.

"You called me a dog," the voice said to Chang. "Know then that you shall die like a dog ere the year has passed."

The voice ceased for a moment and I heard a moan of terror go up from the crowd and from our leader's bodyguard. Then those horible glaring eyes turned slowly in their sockets straight at my friend Wong. Again the voice spoke.

"You, brutal one," it said to Wong, "struck the blow of death. Know that you shall die in the same manner as I died."

Wong screamed and fell grovelling in the dust. An icy hand gripping at my heart, I turned to flee from that awful spot. But the glaring eyes met mine and I could not move. For a third time the voice spoke.

"You, spawn of the gutter," it squeaked, "you saw fit to assist in my

torture. You shall suffer as I have suffered."

Slowly the eyes closed and the voice ceased. For a moment that seemed an age the hush continued, and then from the throat of Chang Tsu, who stood open-mouthed and trembling, came a great bellow of fear and rage.

That shout broke the awful spell upon us and I saw the men of Chang's bodyguard rush in and beat the Thing on the ground into a shapeless mass with their rifle butts. And as they did this the shadow passed from the sun and the field was once more flooded with the blinding glare of midday.

I GROW weaker and know that my end is near, so my story must be told and told quickly. You know, and the world knows, how Chang died. For a year after the death of the old mandarin he waxed daily richer and more powerful, and I have heard that he laughed at the curse that came from those dead lips. He became known as Chang Tsu, the great war lord, and bought an armored train from the British when he declared open war on the government. But one day as the train was crossing a bridge, a bomb exploded beneath it, shattering the war lord's car like a match box.

Twenty men died outright in that explosion, but Chang, though grown fat and soft with rich living, managed to crawl away from the scene, sorely wounded.

Two days later a soldier of the government force, which had bombed the train, found Chang lying sprawled in a rice field. He still breathed, but the soldier put his heel on the wounded man's neck and forced his head into the mud until he strangled. And thus died Chang Tsu, bandit king and human devil, as the head of Wu-fang had said he would —like a dog in a ditch.

Long ere bandit king Chang met the fate the head had decreed, Wong and I had fled from China. Night after night, as we lay in the captured city, the awful eyes and dreaded voice of that horror which lay on the execution ground came to haunt the sleep of Wong, and often I was awakened to hear him screaming against the abomination which insisted that he, who had lopped so many heads from their shoulders, should himself die under the executioner's sword.

I, too, felt the horror of that curse and dreamed my own dreams of undergoing torture such as I had imposed upon scores of Chang's enemies.

For a month Wong and I fought against the icy fear that the head had thrown upon us. Then one night, as the camp slept, Wong crept to my side and whispered that we must desert the forces of Chang Tsu and escape from China. To this I heartily agreed.

We might have gone to the east and thus reached Tientsin and the sea, but we knew that Chang would brook no desertion and that his men would surely capture us if we tried that route. To the west lay deserts and mountains and more deserts. Fierce, savage people lived in these places, but we preferred unknown dangers rather than the known death that awaited us at Chang's hands. When day dawned over the bandit camp we already were miles away.

To the west we went for many weary days, skirting the edge of the great desert that is called the Gobi, climbing wearily through the mountain passes of Inner Mongolia. We were armed, and when we needed food or money we took it from travellers along the way. Some of these, who objected to our methods, we

left lying on the trails, their sightless eyes staring at the burning sun.

But night and day, tramping or killing or sleeping, we had with us the head of the mandarin Wu-fang, and always it whispered, "Remember!"

At last we came to Sinkiang, that great province which lies to the north of Tibet and Afghanistan. It is one great barren desert, except where the mighty mountains rear their snow-capped shoulders into the sky. And it is bitterly cold, and the people, although they are called Chinese, are followers of Mohammed and very savage.

Here, one day, a band of mounted men swept down upon us. Resistance would have been foolish; so we dropped our rifles and were taken captive. The raiders bound us and drove us along with whips, but that night, as our guard dozed, Wong managed to slip from the thongs that held him and fled into the darkness. His escape angered our captors, and they beat me unmercifully as they drove me toward their village. Several also told me that the pain I had already suffered would be child's play to what I could expect when I was turned over to the village women. I shuddered, for I knew what that meant.

And so it came to pass that I became the first to feel the curse of the head of Wu-fang. My shattered body bears witness today to the things that those women did to me. Why I did not die I do not know, unless it was that the head willed that I should live. And the head came to me as I writhed under the knives of the women, and grinned with its thin lips and whispered, "Remember!"

For days they tortured me, but I could not die, and finally they were convinced that I was superhuman. So the headman ordered that the torture cease. And though I could barely totter, they drove me from the village.

How I managed to reach Teheran, which is in Persia, I do not know. Surely I was mad, for when the people of the villages along the route saw my twisted body and heard me mutter of a head that talked to me, they were kind to me as one who had been stricken by Allah.

In Teheran I became sane again; as sane, that is, as the head would allow, but memory drove me on. For three years I wandered. Once I was a sailor aboard a ship which took me to New York, but they would not let me land there. Again I came to London and lived in the place they call Limehouse. And there I met a man who knew my companion Wong, Chang Tsu's one-time headsman. He had joined a band of Apaches in Paris and as "The Chink" had become notorious there for his daring and his brutality.

Though I was penniless and friendless I would not have sought out Wong had not the head of Wu-fang appeared one night as I slept and bade me do so. I could not disobey such an order, and a week later I found Wong in a dive in one of the worst slums of Paris.

My story is nearly ended now and I feel death drawing closer; so I will be content with telling you that the head still haunted Wong as it haunted me. When I told him of how the curse put upon me had come true he shuddered. Yet in the next breath he broke into curses and vowed that he could cheat the head. He cared not, he swore, when death overtook him, but he was determined to die with his head on his shoulders.

Though it pains me now, I must confess that I joined the Apache gang of

which Wong was a member. We did not long remain in Paris, however; for one night Wong's knife drew the life-blood from a man in a café brawl. And the next day the erstwhile headsman of Chang Tsu learned from another thief that "Mother Guillotine," so often spoken of by the Apaches, was really a great blade that severed a man's head from his shoulders. Paris, Wong felt, was no longer healthful for a man who valued his neck.

Within a week Wong and I were in Germany, and there he felt safe; for in Berlin he learned in the underworld that men were hanged for murder. Hanging did not frighten Wong. His only fear was that the curse of the head of Wu-fang would come true. And it did come true!

It did not take long for the Berlin police to drive us out, and we wandered into that border territory which the Germans call the Ruhr. There the head of Wu-fang came oftener to Wong than it had in the past, and he became daily more desperate until one night he killed a man on a crowded street. A policeman seized him before he could flee, and in a week, so swift is German justice, Wong had been condemned to die.

Although the police would not let me see him, I smuggled letters into Wong's cell and his answers reached me. It was easy to see, then, that Wong did not fear death. If anything he welcomed it, for he felt he was to die by the noose and cheat the mandarin's curse.

In those days they executed criminals in the public squares in the Ruhr, and a great crowd had gathered on the morning they led Wong out to die.

He was smiling and his head was high as he mounted the steps. Then he reached the top and I heard him scream. Standing before a block of wood was a big man, and in his hand was a huge, shining ax. Wong had neglected to learn that in that section of Germany the headsman was in vogue, as it is to this day!

They carried Wong to the block, for his legs had collapsed and he was gibbering with fear. When the ax flashed down and Wong's head tumbled into the basket I saw, from my place in the crowd, the head of Wu-fang lying on the platform and grinning at the Thing which had been headsman Wong.

I see the head now, my friend, and I see it very clearly. It is speaking. May the God of the Christians protect me from the Thing that awaits me! . . .

The Cult of the White Ape

By HUGH B. CAVE

An eldritch story of blackest Africa, where strange occult magic is still worked —a horror-story of the Dark Continent

"In a mad circle it rushed, and as it hurtled in front of her she saw something more."

THE hour is midnight. The oil lamp on the table before me, casting its weird glow over my face, is a feeble, inadequate thing that flickers constantly as the corrugated iron roof of the shack trembles with the throbbing beat of incessant rain. It has rained here in the village of Kodagi for the last four months —a horrible, maddening dirge that drives its way into a man's brain and undermines his reason. The M'Boto Hills of the Congo, sunk in the stinking sweat of the rain belt, are cursed with such torment.

It was raining when Matthew Betts came here. I was outside at the time, working on the veranda inside my cage of mosquito-netting. A man must have some relief from the monotony or else go mad; and I had found, after being sent here by the Belgian government to fill the position of *chef de poste*, that my hobby of entomology was a heaven-sent blessing.

When Betts came, I was busily sorting specimens and mounting them on the little oki-wood table in my veranda laboratory. Beside me, on the stoop, squatted

old Kodagi. A cunning man, Kodagi. A wizened monkey of a man with parchment face and filed teeth and a broad grin that bespeaks much hidden knowledge. He belongs, I believe, to the Zapo Zaps—a queerly deformed race which inhabits these mysterious jungles. For years he has been the village Ngana, the witch-doctor and magician of the tribe.

Kodagi, I like to believe, is my friend. It is a peculiar half-dead friendship at most, and yet I am thankful for the little that is allotted me. There are rumors—more than rumors—that Kodagi disliked intensely the white man who held the position of *chef de poste* before me, and that this white man died a slow, unpleasant, and altogether inexplicable death. More than once I have suspected that Kodagi is one of the all-powerful members of the Bakanzenzi—the terrible, cannibalistic secret cult which even the natives of my village speak of in fearful undertones.

Kodagi was watching me astutely as I went about my work. His beady eyes followed me everywhere, saw every movement. Occasionally he muttered something to me under his breath; but the monotonous beat of the rain smothered his voice.

All at once he turned, to stare at the opposite wall of the clearing.

"Look, *Bwana!*" he pointed.

I jerked about obediently, to see the nose of a safari winding its sluggish way into our silent domain. Sloshing through the soft mud they came, with heads down and backs bowed under the weight of their burdens. At their head strode a white man—a hulking buffalo of a man with coarse red face and loose-fitting white drill which hung from him like a drenched winding-sheet. In one hand he carried a kiboko. The other hand he flung up to salute me, and shouted boisterously, at the same time turning in his tracks to snarl at the cringing natives behind him. They were afraid of him evidently, for they cowered back in silence and huddled together in whispering groups while he strode forward to the veranda.

I watched him quietly. I thought I knew his identity, since I had been informed that certain land close to the village had been leased by the officials of a powerful rubber company. This company, the report stated, would send a chap named Betts—Matthew Betts—to the village of Kodagi, where he would experiment with various types of latex-producing trees and vines.

If this was the man they were sending, I decided instantly that I disliked him. He was drunk; and it is not good for white men to drink native rum in the sweating, fever-ridden murk of the Congo, less than five degrees from the equator. I was infinitely glad when my Jopaluo house-boy, Njo, relieved me of the task of opening the veranda door for him.

I SAW then that he was very drunk. He stumbled on the step and lurched forward. Perhaps he did not see Kodagi crouching there; perhaps he saw but did not care. At any rate, his outstretched foot entwined between Kodagi's black legs. He stumbled and caught himself on the mosquito-netting. Then, before I could prevent it, he swung upon Kodagi with a rasping snarl. His heavy boot drove into the Ngana's naked ribs. Kodagi, screaming in pain and writhing hideously, tumbled off the stoop into the mud.

The result was instantaneous. Straightening up, Betts stepped toward me with a livid grin. Two steps he took, and opened his mouth to speak. Then the grin faded with uncanny abruptness, leav-

ing an expression of unholy fear on his bloated face. I saw his eyes dilate. His features lost color. He flung himself sideways and jerked up a Luger in his fist. A sudden belch of flame seared through the muzzle; and the bullets, whining dangerously close to me, roared blindly into a patch of thick scrub beside the veranda rail.

After that there was complete silence for a moment. Betts stood rigid, trembling. Behind him, at the rim of the clearing, the porters of his safari were running madly to safety, screeching in terror. Njo, my house-boy, was down on his knees in the middle of the doorway, muttering in his native tongue. Kodagi, who had been lying prone in the mud at the foot of the stoop, had vanished!

I turned slowly, mechanically, to stare at the clump of brush which had excited Betts' drunken attention. I saw nothing —nothing at all. Frowning, I strode to Betts' side and gripped his arm.

"What the devil," I snapped, "are you doing? Are you mad?"

"Mad? *Mad!*" the words came from his dry mouth in a thick whisper. "You —you didn't see it, Varicks?"

"See what?" I said curtly.

"The—the thing—there in the reeds!" His eyes shifted furtively. Reddish brown eyes, they were, sunk in fatty pits that made them incredibly small and pointed.

"You're drunk," I shrugged. "Come inside."

"I—I saw it, Varicks," he muttered again. "An ape-thing—a *white* ape—big as a man—standing there snarling at me——"

"Come inside," I ordered, taking hold of him. Evidently he had swilled enough native rum to put a less powerful man under the ground. White apes—in the Congo! That was about the limit—the nearest thing to D. T.'s I had seen in many months.

But he refused to be led away. He wrenched his arm from my grip and continued to stand there, staring, muttering something about not daring to turn his back. I saw that I should have to use extreme measures, or else have a raving, fever-drunk lunatic on my hands.

"You're seeing things," I said quietly. "Come on—we'll have a look. If anything was hiding in the reeds, there will be footprints in the mud. You'll see."

He went with me unwillingly, holding back so much that I was practically forced to drag him along. Together we stumped down the veranda steps and wallowed through the mud to the suspicious patch of brush. He stood beside me, uneasy and twitching, as I pushed forward and parted the high reeds with my hands.

Then, very suddenly, I froze in my tracks. My arms remained outflung, like the wings of a great bat. My groping foot stiffened in the very act of kicking the reeds aside; and there, directly beneath it, lay the soggy imprint of another foot!

Betts' eyes went horribly wide and filled with fear. His fingers dug into my forearm. He whispered something, but I did not hear, for I was already on my knees, examining the thing in front of me.

It was the mark of a man's foot—a naked, human foot. In the heel of it, where a little pool of water should have accumulated, lay a well of something else —something red and sticky that was blood.

Without a word I stood up again. Carefully, painstakingly, I examined every inch of that clump of reeds. I found nothing else—nothing but that damning, significant imprint of a human foot and the spilled human blood in the heel of it. When I finally pushed Betts toward the

shack, my fists were clenched and my mouth was screwed into a thin, troubled line. I was afraid.

ON THE veranda, inside the screen of mosquito-netting, I lowered myself heavily into a chair. Betts sat close to me, facing me, peering fearfully into my face. For an instant neither of us offered to break the silence which had crept over us. Then, leaning forward, Betts extended an unsteady hand to clutch my knee. His lips sucked open.

"What—what was it?" he whispered thickly.

I did not answer him immediately. I was thinking of Kodagi, whom he had kicked into the mud, and who had disappeared with such incredible swiftness. One moment the village sorcerer had been lying lifeless in the filth. Next moment Betts had seen that hideous apparition in the reeds, and Kodagi, all at once, had vanished.

"I don't know what it was," I said evenly, replying to Betts' query. "I only know that you've made a horrible blunder."

"A—blunder? Me?"

"In this village," I said meaningly, "one doesn't kick and beat the natives. This is deep-jungle territory. The natives are not the half-civilized, peaceful breed you're accustomed to handling. They are atavistic. Many of them are members of the Bakanzenzi."

"You—you mean——"

"Up here," I said quietly, "you are in the heart of strange jungles and strange people, where queer things take place. That's the best explanation I can offer you."

"But the ape——" he mumbled. "I saw——"

"This is not gorilla country, Betts. The big apes never come here. They never leave their stamping-grounds in the Ogowwi and Kivu districts."

He blinked at me uncomprehendingly. His fat hand came up shakily to wipe the sweat from his jowls. Evidently my words had made a deep impression upon him, for his eyes were quite colorless and his mouth twitched.

"Get me—a drink, Varicks," he said gutturally. "I need it."

I hesitated. He had had enough to drink already. But one more might serve to steady his nerves and prevent a collapse. I got out of my chair to get it.

He rose with me and turned clumsily to the veranda door. Jerking it open, he looked toward the opposite end of the clearing, where his safari had first appeared.

"Lucilia!" he bellowed. "Lucilia!"

I was bewildered—even more bewildered when I followed the direction of his stare and saw what I had not noticed before. A *masheela* chair—a kind of covered hammock carried by four bearers—had been set down at the edge of the jungle. The bearers, having fled like frightened rodents at the sight of Betts' demonstration, had now returned. At the sound of the big man's voice, they lifted the *masheela* and carried it forward.

"My God!" I said thickly. "You haven't brought a woman here?"

"Why not?" Betts grumbled.

"This is no country for a white woman, Betts. You know damned well——"

"That's my business," he snapped. "She's my wife."

I choked the retort that came to my lips. Then I turned to stare at the woman who was approaching us. She was young—much younger than her bull-necked husband—hardly more than a slim, very lovely girl. When Betts spoke her name and she placed her hand in mine, I felt that I should be more than glad to endure

her husband's drunken presence during his stay in Kodagi's village. A white woman, here in this horrible place, was an angel from heaven.

DURING the following day I saw little of Betts and his wife. They drove their safari to the far end of the village and took possession, with their entire equipment, of a huddled group of broken-down, abandoned huts. Njo, my house-boy, brought news to me late in the afternoon, that Betts had gone alone into the jungle on a preliminary tour of inspection.

"Alone?" I frowned, peering into Njo's yellow-toothed mouth.

"Yes, *Bwana.* He is an ignorant fool!"

"Drunk?" I said curtly.

"So drunk, *Bwana,* that he can not walk straight!"

"Hmm. You think he was drunk before, when he claimed to see a white ape in the brush, Njo?" I asked meaningly.

The little Jopaluo's eyes widened in fear. He fell away from me, grimacing. I had to repeat the question before he would answer.

"Others have seen the white ape, *Bwana,*" he whispered uneasily. "I myself have looked upon it one night in the jungle near the moon-tower of the Bakanzenzi; and many of the Manyimas and Zapo Zaps have seen it. It is *mafui*—the were-ape. It is not of this world, *Bwana!*"

"You are afraid, eh?"

"Afraid! Aiiiii! The *mafui* means death!"

I glanced at him quickly. There was no doubt about the terror in his face; it was genuine and abject. With a shrug of indifference, altogether assumed to mask my own forebodings, I turned away—and then turned back again.

"Where is Kodagi?" I demanded.

"He is in his hut, *Bwana,* across the village."

"Go to him then," I ordered, "and tell him that I am sorry for what the big white man did to him. Tell him to come here and I will take the pain from his bruises."

"Yes, *Bwana!*"

Njo scurried out, leaving me alone. For some time I paced back and forth in the central room of the shack, listening to the throb of rain on the roof above me. Presently I went out on the veranda. I made sure that my revolver—a Webley forty-four—hung in its holster at my belt.

AN HOUR later Betts came to visit me. He came alone, wallowing and sloughing through the black mud, completely drunk and in ill temper. He fell shakily into a veranda chair beside me.

"Stinkin' weather!" he cursed. "Rain, rain——"

"You're drinking too much," I said curtly. "A man can't bloat himself with liquor up here and remain alive as well, Betts. He can't——"

"Can't!" he bellowed. "You and the rest of the fools in this country make a bloody creed out of that word. Can't do this; can't do that. They told me I can't grow rubber in the Ituri district. Well, by God, I've got the concession and I'm going to!"

I shrugged. If he wished to kill himself with native poison, that was his affair. But I thought of his girl-wife—slim, flower-faced, and so very lovely. I pitied her from the bottom of my heart.

It would be the inevitable conclusion. He would drink himself semi-insane. The rain would beat into his mind and drive out reason. He would turn on Lucilia, make life a living hell for her. From the momentary glance I had already had of

her troubled face, it was evident that the process had already begun.

"Look here," I began curtly. "You've got to send your wife out of this. You've no right to keep her here and——"

The door opened behind me. I turned quickly, to see Njo, the house-boy, scuffing toward me. He had returned from the village. He had a message for me.

Bending over, he delivered it in a whisper.

"Kodagi says, *Bwana,*" he muttered, "that he will come and he thanks you. He says that you are his friend, but the red-eyed white man had better beware. That is all, *Bwana.*"

Njo stepped back and vanished. With tight-pressed lips I turned back to Betts.

"There is danger here," I said grimly. "You have no right to expose your wife to it."

"No? You're gettin' pretty damned interested in her, ain't you?"

"I am doing what you are too drunk to do!" I snapped, choking back my temper. It was an effort, just then, to keep from taking his thick throat between my fingers and twisting some sense into him.

"If it's so almighty dangerous," he leered, "what are *you* stayin' here for then?"

"Because the danger does not concern me. I don't kick witch-doctors, Betts. I don't shoot at white apes. I make a point of minding my own business."

"Well?"

"My predecessor was a man of your type, Betts. He did about as he pleased. He died very slowly and unpleasantly—and mysteriously."

My words had no effect. Betts lumbered to his feet, swaying unsteadily, and grinned down at me.

"You're worse than the niggers with your damned superstitions," he scoffed. "Me—I'm hard-headed and sensible. I'm goin' to finish what I started."

"You refuse to send Lucilia——"

"She stays right here with me. I got to have some one to pour drinks for me, Varicks. She ain't much good for anythin' else, but she'll learn."

"Have you——" I began, then caught myself. My question was too delicate.

"Wot?"

"Have you been married long?"

"About a month," he grumbled, turning away. "That's all—about a month. I'm thinkin' it was a mistake. But I reckon she'll learn. I'll teach her."

Then he groped down the steps and staggered away into the darkness.

I saw him many times after that. He was continually under the effect of liquor, and he came to me bragging and boasting about the progress he was making. Already he had repaired his huts to withstand the hammering rain. Already he had made preparations for planting his latex-producing shrubs and vines.

His wife seldom accompanied him when he came to visit me. At first I could not understand this; but then, one night when she did come with him, I knew the reason. She was ashamed.

Her lovely throat bore indelible marks of finger-prints. Her left cheek, pallid and colorless, was scratched with a livid red welt, where he had either struck her or raked her with his fingernails. Yet, even though we met by chance occasionally when he was not about, she refrained from mentioning these things to me.

Then one night Betts said to me quizzically:

"I been lookin' at a big clearin' about a quarter of a mile back in the jungle, Varicks. What in hell is the tower affair in the middle of it?"

I knew what he meant. He had stum-

bled upon a wide amphitheater far from the village proper, where members of the secret cult of the Bakanzenzi, according to whispered rumors, were supposed to meet. As for the tower, it was a solid pillar of gleaming white stone, somewhat squat and encircled by a platform at the top, which rose, like a thing of another world, from the reeds of the clearing.

During my four months' stay in Kodagi's village, I had examined this tower many times. It was not hollow, but solid and thick; and the stones had evidently been brought from a great distance, since I could find no others like them in the surrounding district. It is my belief—and I am sure that the belief is no idle supposition—that this tower was built many hundreds of years ago by the Phenicians. There are many such towers scattered throughout Africa's gloomy interior. They were originally erected to the Phenician goddess, Astarte—but now, naturally enough, they are sacred to native gods and exponents of black magic and *mafui*.

I explained this, as best I could, to the man who sat before me. He shrugged at mention of Astarte; he sneered when I spoke of *mafui*.

"What is this Bakanzenzi of yours?" he grinned.

"What is it?" I said quietly. "I am not sure, Betts. For that matter, no white man is ever sure of the secret cults. The Bakanzenzi are cannibals, who are said to be able to transform themselves into animals at certain times. Kodagi has told me that the tower-glade is sacred to the Bakanzenzi. They hold their rites by the old white tower. The walls of the glade are made up of twisted, writhing-limbed oki-trees, said to be magic. According to Kodagi, the penalty for disturbing the sacred amphitheater is death — horrible and certain."

"Rot," Betts grunted. "You're an old woman, Varicks."

"I have lived in these jungles long enough to be careful," I said simply.

"Yeah? Well, I've been here long enough to know that the glade is good planting-ground. Tomorrow I'm diggin' up the ground around the white tower and plantin' it with rubber vines. Tell *that* to your blasted Bakanzenzi!"

I argued with him. He told me curtly that the ground came within his jurisdiction and he intended to do as he pleased. Moreover, he did it. The following day he put his entire gang of blacks to work, planting the glade of Astarte with indigenous rubber plants and vines. He drove the natives brutally; and while they did his work for him, he sprawled in the shadow of the tower and swilled rotten whisky into his stomach.

THAT night his wife came to my shack —alone. We sat inside, out of the chill, moisture-ridden air; and I saw, as she leaned close to me in the glow of the lamp, that fresh marks of brutality were livid on her face and neck.

"I—I am afraid," she whispered tensely. "He is drinking more than ever. He has whipped some of our black boys until they can hardly walk!"

"He has also—beaten you?" I suggested softly.

She turned her face away. A dull line of crimson crept about her throat and rose higher. Reaching out, I took her hand and held it.

"There is bound to be trouble," I said bitterly. "You say he has beaten the natives—and yet no natives have come to me with complaints. That is ominous. They would ordinarily bring their troubles to me, since I am in charge. This silence means that they intend to settle the score on their own account."

"You—you can do nothing?"

"I will do my best. Kodagi is coming here tomorrow, to have his wounds redressed. He was kicked brutally, severely. I am afraid there are internal injuries."

Lucilia's hand slipped unconsciously to her own side. She winced and stifled an exclamation of pain as her fingers touched some hidden bruise. I knew then that Betts had used his heavy boots on more than Kodagi; and a sullen rage found its way into my heart. God—if I ever *caught* him kicking her!

"Does he know you are here?" I said suddenly.

"No," she said, shaking her head heavily. "He—he has taken to going into the bush at night—alone. I do not know where he goes. He is always drunk—savage. I dare not question him."

My fists clenched. I saw that she was crying softly, and drew her close to me so that her head rested on my shoulder.

"Why does he hate you, Lucilia?" I pleaded.

"Because—because he is drunk. And because he is jealous of you. You are all that he would like to be. Clean—strong——"

"If I were strong in courage," I said bitterly, "I would take you away from him."

She raised her face slowly, almost entreatingly.

"I—wish you would—Lyle," she whispered.

Then I caught myself. She was his wife; I was a civilized white man, in spite of our surroundings. I could kill him—and would kill him—if I found him mistreating her. But I could not make love to her, in spite of my emotions. There was a difference between protection and theft.

I walked back with her, through the rain. The hut where she lived was empty. Betts had not returned. I whispered farewell to her and returned, with slow steps and heavy heart, to my own dreary shanty on the other side of the village.

KODAGI came the next afternoon, limping painfully and supporting himself on the shoulders of two of the Zapo Zaps. I dressed his wounds with infinite care. Then, thinking to insure his friendship, I led him and his two henchmen into the rear room of the shanty. There I gave them presents of cigarettes and other valueless odds and ends which might catch their fancy. In addition, I allowed them to peer through the high-powered microscope which stood on the table—a thing which had always excited their curiosity in the past.

Kodagi bent over the instrument for many minutes, finally stepping aside to make room for one of his companions. He grinned at me gratefully. I attempted, then, to explain the secret of it to him.

"You see," I said, "the high-powered lenses make things seem larger than they really are and——"

The door slammed open behind me, drowning my words. I swung about, ready for any kind of emergency in view of what had already occurred. I found myself face to face with Betts, who stood swaying in the doorway.

He was savagely drunk—more drunk than I had ever before seen him. He lunged toward me with both hands outflung, snarling like an animal.

"So you're here, are you!" he rasped. "You——"

The curse was not pleasant. It was a livid torrent of abuse and epithet.

"What do you want?" I said crisply. Kodagi and his men had stepped away from the table and were watching me intently.

"You know damned well what I want!" he bellowed. "My wife comes here when I'm away in the jungle, does she? You and her——"

There was but one answer possible. I seized his arms and flung him away from me.

"You're drunk!" I said curtly. "If you say another word—by God, Betts, you're not fit to live with a woman. If you don't stop your infernal drinking and quit beating the natives, I'll have you sent back to the coast. You—you scum!"

He caromed across the floor like a top-heavy bullock. For thirty seconds he glared at me; and the utter hate and jealousy in his face must have been visible even to Kodagi and the Zapo Zaps. Then, with a burning oath, he clawed at the revolver in his belt.

He was drunk enough to have killed me. Luckily his fingers were clumsy, slippery with sweat. Before he could get the thing free and level it, I was upon him. My fist ground into his mouth. He jerked erect under the impetus of the blow; then, groping for support with lifeless fingers, he slumped to the floor unconscious.

Kodagi and the two natives faded silently through the open doorway. They said nothing; they departed like ghosts. I was left alone with the limp thing on the floor.

For a moment I stood stiff by the table, undecided whether to leave him there or to make some attempt to revive him. Then I considered that after all he had been drunk; he had not known what he was doing. I dropped to my knees beside him and wiped the blood from his face.

SOME ONE else entered the shack then. I heard the veranda door open and close, and hesitant steps crossed the outer room. I glanced up to find Lucilia standing above me, on the threshold.

"You—you have killed him?" she whispered tensely.

"No. He would have killed me."

A soft, choking exclamation came from her pale lips. She stared into Betts' face; and as she did so, the renegade's eyes twitched open.

We were silent, all three of us, for a long moment. Presently Betts groped to his feet and stood confronting us. A sneer curled his mouth.

"I suppose you're damned glad," he said gutturally, turning to his wife, "that Varicks did for me."

"Yes," she said simply. "I am."

"Yeah?" he snarled. "Well, by God, I'll change *that* before I'm done!"

He turned heavily, without a word to me, and lurched over the sill. I heard him stagger through the outer room. The veranda door thudded. Lucilia and I were alone.

"Why did you come here?" I shrugged. "You know it brings his madness to the surface."

"I had to come, Lyle. When he left me, he was insane. He—he might have killed you."

She seized my arm passionately. Her face was ghastly white.

"I'm afraid of him, Lyle!" she said fervently. "He—he is becoming an animal. At the slightest sound, he turns with horrible quickness to stare behind him, like a thing of the jungle. He walks on tiptoe and talks in a whisper when we are alone. When he thinks I am not looking, he mutters to himself and claws at the empty air, as if bats were fighting him."

"Vampire bats," I said aloud, without meaning to utter the words.

"What?" she said suddenly.

"Nothing," I mumbled. "You had better go back. It is not safe for you to excite his temper. If anything happens, come to me at once."

"I wish—oh, I wish I could stay here with you!"

"So do I," I said sincerely. "But it's impossible."

She walked out with dragging steps. I could read the anguish in her stooped shoulders and hanging head. But I could do nothing, then. I could only stare, and let her go.

When she had gone, I made an attempt to be rational. For an hour I worked over my case of entomological specimens, labelling them and separating them into their proper groups. But my mind was not on the work. My thoughts persisted in returning to her description of Betts' mysterious behavior.

I have studied medicine to some extent; and I knew that a medical diagnosis of Betts' malady was simple enough and completely devoid of mystery. The man had delirium tremens. He was on the verge of madness, brought on by an excess of native rum and bad whisky. And yet when I considered old Kodagi's sudden disappearance in that first hour of torment—when I considered the tower of Astarte and the horrible cult of the Bakanzenzi—I knew that the medical explanation was not complete. Other things—unknown, unnamed things of darkness and the jungle—had taken possession.

AN HOUR dragged on. It was nearly midnight when I heard the door of my shanty clatter open. I turned from the specimen table with both of my arms uplifted to defend myself—and then my arms dropped helplessly as Lucilia stumbled into the room.

"He is gone!" she said sibilantly.

"Gone?" I repeated. "Where?"

"He was in the house when I returned. I heard him pacing back and forth in his own room, mumbling and talking to himself. I sat on the stoop and waited—waited for him to come out and—and beat me. I must have fallen asleep—from exhaustion. When I awoke, the shack was abandoned. He has gone into the jungle again, Lyle!"

I stood rigid, undecided what to do. She came closer and stared pitifully into my face.

"Lyle," she whispered, "his — his clothes are thrown on the bunk where he sleeps. He—he must be naked!"

"In the jungle—*naked?*" I said roughly. "Good God, no!"

"It is true, Lyle. He is an animal. He——"

But I thrust her aside. This ghastly affair had reached its climax, and I was determined to settle it once and for all.

"Stay here," I ordered crisply. "I intend to find him."

She slumped into a chair. I threw a coat about my shoulders and strode into the outer room, where Njo was asleep upon his bunk in the corner. I prodded him to consciousness and swore at him because he sat like a monkey on the edge of the bunk, blinking at me in bewilderment. Then, with the little Jopaluo trailing at my heels, I stepped into the night.

The clearing lay in nearly complete darkness. For once, the rain had ceased its monotonous drizzle; and the jungle was buried under a steaming mist. The sky was grayish black, void of stars. The moon, hanging in the middle of it like a blurred lantern, was blood-red.

We went straight to Betts' hut. There, with the aid of the search-lamp in my clenched fist, we found the man's spoor leading from the rear door—and the prints were those of naked feet! It was not difficult to trail that curious line of tracks into the jungle.

For twenty minutes we continued, following a well-beaten path through the jungle. In this manner we came to that

significant grove in the midst of the great trees, where the gleaming tower of Astarte stuck up from the reeds like a white tooth.

And there, at the base of the tower, we found a continuation of Betts' naked footprints. Round and round the tower they went—a circular, deep-beaten path of fresh imprints made by naked feet. And there they ended.

Confused, bewildered, not at all sure of my own sanity, I led the way back to my own shanty. For a long time I talked to Lucilia of what I had seen; and finally, mastering the fear of her heart, she returned to her hut. Far into the night I sat on the veranda of my place, smoking and waiting and wondering. It was the night before the full moon.

IN THE morning, Betts came to me cursing. He made no mention of the previous night. He was blind with rage because many of the euphorbias, which he had brought all the way from Madagascar and planted in the grove, had been uprooted. He demanded that I find the culprit.

I could do nothing, and I told him so. Still cursing, he slunk into the jungle.

I heard no more from him during the hours of daylight. Nor did I hear from Lucilia, who, for the sake of her own safety, refrained from coming near me. But when night came, and the moon swung into a sky of pitch, the village chief made a visit to my shanty and stood before me on the veranda.

"I come, *Bwana,*" he said bitterly, "for justice. The red-eyed white man has done murder. He has killed two of the men who worked for him."

I did not bother to ask useless questions. My position of *chef de poste* demanded that I do one thing—and one thing only. Strapping a revolver holster about my belt, I went directly to Betts' abode.

His wife opened the door to me and stared at me in consternation. She must have read the anger in my face, for I confess that I made no attempt to conceal it. Betts himself sat slumped in a chair close to the table.

I accused him outright of murdering two of the blacks. He lurched to his feet and snarled into my mouth.

"Why wouldn't I?" he rasped. "They were pullin' up my rubber plants in the grove. I caught 'em at it! By God, I'll murder the whole bloody tribe if they don't leave my plants alone!"

"You're under arrest!" I snapped. "This is my village. I won't stand for——"

He moved with such uncanny quickness that I could not prevent it. His fist hammered into my eyes, hurling me into the wall. I heard Lucilia scream as I went down. I saw Betts, running with tremendous speed and agility, swirl across the threshold and race into the jungle. Staggering up, I wiped the blood from my face and plunged after him. The jungle closed over me.

I had no flash-lamp this time. There was nothing to light the trail. The moon above the trees was full and vivid, but here it was blotted out completely by interlaced branches and creepers. I stumbled headlong, plunging into unseen thickets and strangling vines. For half an hour I groped through the bush, stopping at intervals to listen for sounds of the fugitive. Once I heard a scream—a woman's scream. At that moment I did not realize the hellish portent of it, and so I continued to fight my way forward.

Then it came. I had no defense against it, since it fell upon me from behind. As I faltered in the darkness, the underbrush broke apart behind me. I heard a

sudden terrifying suck of breath. Then something—God, I can not force myself to call it human!—something hideously powerful, stark naked, reeking with the stench of liquor, crushed me into the dank floor of the jungle. A white arm lashed about my throat. I was lifted bodily and flung over a sweat-soaked shoulder. At terrific speed I was borne through the jungle. Overhanging vines tore at my face and beat against me, filling my eyes with blood. I believe I lost consciousness.

WHAT happened from then on is a blur of agony. I felt the naked form beneath me heaving and panting as it raced on and on through the pitch. Then the jungle opened wide and a gleaming white glare, from the moon above, blinded me. I was carried another hundred steps, then flung to the ground. When my eyes opened, staring through a mask of blood, I found myself bound hand and foot with reed ropes and lying in a contorted position at the foot of that mysterious, curious tower of Astarte, in the center of the forbidden amphitheater of the Bakanzenzi!

Something stirred beside me. I jerked myself about fearfully, expecting anything. My eyes went wide in horror. There, flung brutally against the stone not two yards away from me, and moaning with the pain of the reeds that cut into her wrists and ankles, lay Lucilia. I can see her face a hundred times over, so deeply was it engraved with fear!

I could say nothing. My mouth welled with blood; my lips were thick and swollen. Dumbly I stared out into the clearing. The moon, hanging very low over the great ceiba silk-cotton trees and borassus palms at the rim of the amphitheater, had not yet swung deep enough to illuminate the tower. The entire center of the clearing lay in mottled blackness, masking the tower in shadow.

But we were not alone. Out there, half hidden in the gloom, a huge white shape inhabited the shadows with us. I could see it lumbering around the tower, mumbling and wailing to itself in a guttural voice that rose, at sudden intervals, into a screaming chant. In a mad circle it rushed, and as it hurtled past in front of me I saw something more—a jet-black bat-shape flapping and fluttering about its head. I saw the flame of fireflies swirling.

Terror came to me then. I shrank close to the girl beside me, and I was mortally afraid. The thing out there was Betts. I *knew* it was Betts. Yet the thought brought no consolation, for the creature was a stark naked raving madman in the grip of some weird occult power beyond my comprehension.

I stared into Lucilia's eyes.

"How—how did you come here?" I choked. "Did he——"

"He came back as soon as you had gone, Lyle! He was naked, mad! He seized me—carried me here——"

Something in her voice gave me courage, because I knew that she needed me. It was a strange time to think of love; and yet I knew, at that mad moment, that I loved her, that she loved me in return. This ordeal had thrown us together and made us realize the truth.

I lifted my head then and shouted to the terrible thing that lumbered about us.

"Betts!" I screamed. "Betts! Get hold of yourself, man. You're mad!"

The naked thing stopped in its tracks and laughed hideously. I saw it point to the rising moon. Behind it, at the edge of the jungle, I thought I saw the massive underbrush sway and rustle with a significant, peculiar movement, as if a horde of unseen things lay in wait there.

Then, chattering frantically, the horrible mad thing continued its ceaseless circle.

Once again fear gripped me. I stared with unblinking eyes, waiting and wondering what the end would be. Somehow I knew that Betts was not alone. The Bakanzenzi—the dreaded cult which held its rites in this clearing at the height of the full moon—were somewhere about, only waiting until the moon-white should reach the sacred tower.

Then, at my feet, a shaft of moonlight fell upon the base of the column. The great white shape stopped its prowling and stepped full into the glow. I saw every detail of Betts' unclad form—a terrible naked figure covered with self-inflicted cuts and slashes.

HE APPROACHED with short, jerky steps, flinging his arms wildly.

"Betts!" I shouted. "For God's sake——"

He ignored me. In a shrill, screeching voice he began to speak, turning his bloody head in all directions as if he were addressing some immense gathering. The man was gripped with some tremendous power of hallucination. He saw things which did not exist—or perhaps they *did* exist and were beyond my human perceptions!

"The time has come!" he muttered. "The moon has risen to the sacred tower. The unbelievers must die, as it was ordained by the Goddess of the Tower! The time—is—now!"

He flung himself forward. I saw his arm lunge up. The pallid white light gleamed on the blade of a horribly long knife clenched in his fist. I closed my eyes with a shudder. Lucilia, pressed close against me, moaned softly and tried to take my hand.

But Betts did not reach us. A furious burst of sound stopped him in his tracks. From all sides of the tower it came—the wild, thunderous beat of drums. It rose out of the jungle like the hammering of rain on a tent-top, deafening in its intensity. At the same moment a hairy arm, stark white and gleaming in the moonlight, twisted about my waist from behind and lifted me from the base of the tower. A sudden stench of rancid flesh came over me, strong enough to be nauseating. I felt myself carried, at a curious lumbering, rolling gait, through the high reeds to the jungle rim. There, in the protecting shadow of the borassus palms, I was flung down. Lucilia Betts was tossed beside me; and when I regained my senses long enough to stare about me, the monstrous hairy creature had vanished. Vanished just as Kodagi had vanished from the mud of the village floor!

Then it began in earnest.

The drums took up a wild reverberation. There was no steady beat; merely a continuous roar of noise emanating out of nothing. Betts, adding his voice to the tumult, had dropped his knife and was once more lumbering round and round the white tower, trotting with the shifting gait of a great gorilla. Beyond him, all about him, I saw native forms, glistening black in the glare of the moon. Like ants they were, crouching in the reeds; and their faces were hidden behind triangular black masks of carved wood—the sign of the Bakanzenzi!

They watched Betts with a hungry stare, as if waiting for something. He saw them. His even, rolling stride became a peculiar jumping, hopping gait, altogether erratic. But still he moved in the same mad circle!

There could be no more horror—so I thought. The only thing that kept me from going insane was the touch of Lucilia's hands on my manacled arms. Then her voice screamed beside me.

"The tower! Oh—God! Look!"

She shrank against me, trembling. But my eyes were riveted to the top of the tower, open wide in the culmination of horror. There, peering down at Betts with savage lust, hung a face—a hideous face, white and hairy and huge, with drooling fangs that glistened in the light. An ape's face—a white ape of enormous size, larger than the gorillas of the Kivu country!

The thing dropped down behind Betts. It followed him in his route about the tower, trotting clumsily behind him and making no attempt to close the intervening distance. Then Lucilia screamed again; and I saw another of those horrible white shapes appear in the top of the tower, to drop down and join in the procession. One after another they come, as if by magic, to leap into the rushing circle of monstrosities headed by Betts. When I finally closed my eyes, overcome by the horror of it, more than a score of them had joined the ring.

I think then that the moon-glow struck the tip of the tower, as a signal. A peculiar vibrating chant rose all about me, rising and falling like a tide of water. A dozen scattered fires leaped into being about the clearing, as if they had been waiting for some hidden sign. The light was blinding, bewildering. It roared and flickered and threw great blotches of sparks into the vivid sky. The Bakanzenzi were dancing—dancing and screaming and hammering on their infernal drums.

And suddenly the natives were no longer there—no longer before me. In their place appeared creatures of the jungle. I saw leopards swirling in the reeds; great rock pythons coiled in the glare of the fires, filling the night with their hissing voices; crocodiles thrashing about with open jaws; bush-pigs racing madly! The terrible lingas and dinwinti drums roared faster and faster.

Lucilia fainted then. I pressed her close to me and stared in horror. The great apes were rumbling, hammering upon their chests as they lumbered about the tower. Their fanged mouths were open, dripping saliva. And Betts was no longer leading them in the ritual—he was racing at top speed, as fast as his sweating legs would carry him, to *escape!* His voice rose in a tortured screech, full of terror. He raised his arms to the moon, blubbering in torment.

I could not close my eyes. Every detail of that mad scene burned into my brain. The fires, already burning and waiting for their cannibalistic offering — the jungle creatures writhing and leaping about the flames—the great apes of the tower closing in on their victim with relentless certainty. God!

Then they caught him. I heard a heart-rending scream that rose in livid crescendo and was smothered at its peak. Then came a mighty crash of sound, a deafening bellow; and the giant *mafui* apes dragged their victim down. I fainted.

WHEN I opened my eyes again, I peered into the frightened face of Njo, my house-boy. I lay on the veranda of my own shanty, in the village of Kodagi, and Lucilia Betts lay ten feet distant from me, sprawled pitifully on the stoop. Njo was struggling faithfully to pour brandy between my clenched teeth.

"Who—who brought me here?" I said thickly, gripping his arm.

The Jopaluo peered into my face and shuddered.

"You were here, *Bwana,*" he whispered fearfully. "I found both of you here at daylight, when the screams of leopards and the dinwinti drums awakened me."

I could get no more out of him, in

spite of my questioning. That was his story—he had found us there on the veranda at daylight.

When I had recovered strength I left him to care for Lucilia, while I stumbled back through the jungle to the clearing of the Bakanzenzi. I was determined to know the truth.

The amphitheater was deserted. At the base of the tower I found stains of blood and many, many footprints—*human* footprints. Side by side in the muddy ground I found two other things of mystery. One was a crescent-shaped disk of mother-of-pearl—the ancient symbol of Astarte. The other, half buried in the mud, was a gold seal ring bearing Betts' initials—and inside it, curled maliciously and staring up at me with cloudy gold eyes, lay a tiny green whip-snake—the symbol of the Bakanzenzi.

ON MY way back to the shanty, I made a visit to the hut of old Kodagi, for the purpose of asking him a single significant question. Quietly I pushed aside the reed mat that hung over the entrance; and Kodagi was sitting there on the floor, blinking at me.

"Do you know," I said simply, squatting beside him, "where Betts is?"

He peered into my face for a long time. A wealth of uncanny wisdom and knowledge was engraved in his parchment features at that particular moment.

"Last night, *Bwana*," he shrugged, "I heard the screams of the leopards and the victory cries of the great apes. It is possible that Betts was torn by the big cats—or killed by a wandering tribe of gorillas from the Kivu."

"Apes——" I muttered. "It was an ape who carried Lucilia and me to safety under the borassus palms. An ape——"

"Perhaps, *Bwana*," Kodagi said softly, "the ape was your friend. Perhaps he saved you because you were kind to him, healing his wounds and letting him peer through your magic instruments and——"

My head came up with a jerk.

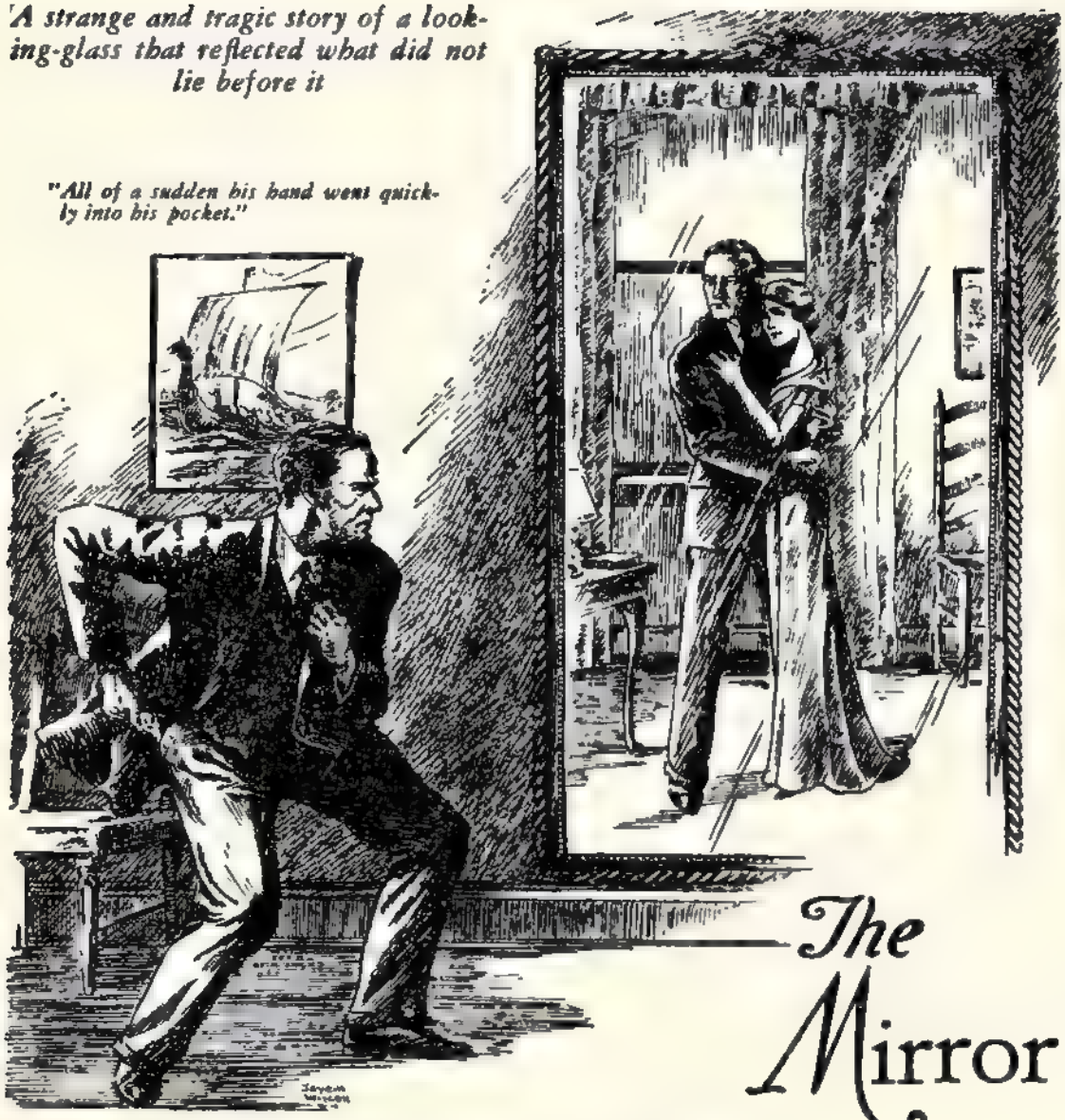
"What?" I snapped.

"Nothing, *Bwana*. I was talking to myself. I always talk to myself when it is raining, *Bwana*—and you see for yourself it is raining again."

And so I left him. And tonight, now that the ordeal is finished, I find myself unable to sleep. I am sitting here with pencil and paper in the inner room of my shanty, with the flickering lamplight playing over my shrunken face. Lucilia has gone to her own hut, with Njo to keep guard over her until morning. Then she and I, together, will depart from this strange village and leave behind us, for ever, the domain of the Bakanzenzi and the hideous region of *mafui*. We shall be married at the mission of the white fathers in the village of Bugani, twenty miles down-river, and from there we shall go directly to the coast.

There I shall make my report to the government, and in it I shall say that Betts was devoured by leopards. But Lucilia and I—and old Kodagi, who squats for ever on the floor of his hut and is wiser by far than any of us—we know better.

A strange and tragic story of a looking-glass that reflected what did not lie before it



"All of a sudden his hand went quickly into his pocket."

The Mirror

By GEORGE BURROWES

WEDNESDAY, midnight.

The most inconceivable thing has happened today. Indeed it is as much to convince myself that I'm not stark mad as it is to make a record for future reference that I (much against my custom) begin this journal. I presume there will have to be some sort of investigation, but I don't know by whom. One can't judge by analogy with other cases because there never have been any other cases.

For lucidity I may as well begin by stating that this ponderous old Clarendon Street house has been mine in title ever since my wife died nine years ago, and I have lived alone in it all that time. Alone, that is, so far as any members of my

family are concerned, but not strictly alone, for I have found it necessary to take "guests"; in other words, ordinary roomers, although in this part of Back Bay we would never call them that, nor ever allow a "vacancy" sign to be put in the window. I have a housekeeper, of course, and it is she who is really the landlady. I never have any dealings with my "guests" at all except in a social way.

On the whole, I have been extremely fortunate. I take only gentlemen, middle-aged or elderly for the most part, and two of them, on the third floor, have been with me for seven years. Mr. Raleigh, with whom today's events are concerned, has been here two years and a half. He occupies the most expensive room in the house, the big front parlor on the second floor. I have had a lavatory built into one of its spacious closets.

Raleigh must be a man of some independent means, because he has no visible occupation that could bring him much income. He writes articles for philosophical publications and for some of the scientific journals, but I have heard that such things pay very little or nothing at all. I am neither a scientist nor a philosopher; so the numerous times that we have had a chat together, our topics of conversation have been entirely general, revolving mostly about the news of the day. No one could call us intimate, although it has been my habit, for the past few months, to drop in on him in the evening, two or three times a week, and take a bit of sherry before his fire. This I did last night, and this I presume I should have done again tonight had not this thing occurred.

Now—it was about four o'clock this afternoon when I went to his room and rapped on the door. He offered to lend me, last night, a new biography we had been talking of, and I forgot to carry it away with me when I left. I very much wanted it this afternoon and went to fetch it. But I got no reply to my rap. I never, of course, enter my guests' rooms when they are not in, but this time I had no compunctions at all about entering, bent as I was on such a legitimate errand. So I opened the door and went in.

The room was empty. The late afternoon sun was streaming in through the windows, which are partly covered by heavy, dark red curtains, and there was no fire burning on the hearth. I went at once to the marble-topped table which stands against the wall at the rear of the room. It was there I remembered placing the book after I had glanced through it. And it was still there. I picked it up and was about to leave when something caught my eye which made me stop dead-still for a moment.

In the exact center of the rear wall, directly opposite the windows, there has hung for as long as I can remember a great mirror in a carved wooden frame. It is a huge thing, and ugly I suppose, but it has always been the feature of this room. I hazard a guess that it is a good seven and a half or eight feet tall and possibly five feet wide. And it was in this mirror, whose reflection encompasses the entire room, that I saw what I did see.

I saw a distinct movement in the red curtains at one of the windows behind me, and it was plainly evident that some one was hiding there, because I could see the bulge.

I WAS not alarmed. Perhaps I should have been, and perhaps my first thought should have been that there was an intruder there. But on the contrary, my first thought—and indeed my only thought—was that it was Raleigh, hiding there to escape my company. And I must admit that I was taken aback and that I

had a touch of wounded pride. Few indeed are the people to whom I am not a wholly welcome visitor.

It was, therefore, this same touch of pride which made me replace the book on the table. If Raleigh cared to avoid me by such cheap means, then most certainly I had no desire to borrow his property. So, as I say, I replaced the book and started to leave the room. I had to go obliquely toward the windows to reach the door to the hall, and as I neared them I could not, much as I wanted to, refrain from casting a glance at the curtain behind which he was presumably hiding—and strangely enough it was hanging as straight and as unruffled as the others!

Well—then I stopped again, and I suppose I chuckled to myself at my imbecility and at the trick my eyes had played on me. And, completely cured of my spasm of anger, I retraced my steps to the table to get the book again—which I wanted most intensely.

Now I *know* I did not look into the mirror again by design. In other words, it was a movement again which attracted my attention and which made me stand there, gazing into the glass.

And most distinctly, in the reflection, I could see the outline of a man's figure behind the curtain.

Now I *was* alarmed. Now the thought of a burglar did enter my head, replacing all idea of Raleigh hiding there—although why the sudden change came about, I can't say. I know that I wheeled around and faced the windows and called, "Who's there?"

There was no reply, and so far as I could see the curtains were undisturbed.

There was nothing to do but laugh to myself once more, although a bit nervously, and then turn quickly toward the mirror again and see what could be making the illusion. And illusion or not, there was the bulge, and I turned several times from windows to mirror, from mirror to windows, seeing in one case serenely hanging curtains and in the other their distortion. Yet, in the reflection, the curtains at the *other* windows were as undisturbed as they were in actuality.

So it was at this point that I made the move which finally explained it all. I went directly down the length of the room to the window in question and shook the curtain which had puzzled me. There was, of course, no one behind it at all. But then, still standing there with the stuff in my hand, I turned and faced the mirror again, and although the distance was great and the reflection small, I still could discern that bulge. What was making it?

I shook the curtain with my eyes on the mirror, and its corresponding reflection shook in unison, but the bulge remained. So then, with my eyes still on the mirror, I gave a yank and jerked the hanging stuff aside until it should reveal the bare panelling behind it.

It did not! In the glass I had uncovered the figure of Raleigh, pressed against the panelling, staring out at me.

Yet no one in reality stood there!

Now, I possibly am setting this down at too great length, but still I want to make a record of my own actions and, to an extent, of my own feelings, merely to prove, in any future eventuality, that I had no hand in conniving at what he has done. But now, with this out of the way, I can state the truth deliberately. *Raleigh has gone into that mirror and he is still there!*

I CAN set it all down now, calmly enough, for I have had eight hours to get used to it. But there was no such calmness in me, I can say, at the moment when I saw him there and let the curtain

fall from my hand until, in the mirror, its folds covered him. I was shaking all over and my knees threatened to collapse under me. I have no doubt at all that, had Raleigh not made the next move, I should have fled from the room, convinced of my insanity. But Raleigh did move. Leaving the actual curtains beside me undisturbed, he flung the reflected curtains aside and stepped out from behind them. His reflection (no, I *mustn't* call it his reflection!) came toward me in the mirror, and beckoned to me to come toward him.

I went. I found it difficult to make my legs respond, but I went just the same until I was standing near enough to the mirror to touch it, and he was standing just inside. It was the most curious sight I have ever seen. There was I, and there was my reflection. There was *he,* standing beside my reflection; yet in the room with me there was no one at all!

He was trying to speak to me. His lips were moving, but they made no sound, and I am very poor at reading lips. But finally, when he had repeated something very slowly, several times, I made out that he was telling me not to be alarmed. He threw out his hands in a gesture that seemed to say, "After all, here I am and there's nothing you can do about it." And I must confess that I was calming down somewhat and that the first stunning shock of surprize and fright had relapsed into trembling curiosity. Then I noticed that he was beginning to signal me to do something. He was pointing behind me and moving his lips, but I couldn't make out what he was trying to make me understand. Finally, leaving his side of the mirror he walked away from it, toward the door of the reflected room and closed it. Then he turned and motioned for me to do the same.

And it was quite true! He had closed his door without it having any effect on mine! What was it in there? A separate world with an existence of its own?

When I got back to the mirror again, he was standing there once more and making further motions. He was pointing first to my mouth and then to the mouth of my image which was beside him. Then he pointed to his own ear and nodded, then to my mouth again, and then to my reflection's mouth. And at last I grasped his idea. He wanted me to talk. Did he actually mean that in that mirrored room my image could talk and be heard?

That was what I asked him, and my voice rang strangely in the empty room.

"Raleigh, do you mean to say you can hear me?"

He nodded, but then quickly shook his head, and with a little smile pointed to my reflection, as if to say that it was not I whom he heard, but that other I.

"Then I can ask you questions and you can reply by nodding or shaking your head?"

He nodded, smiling out at me—a little pitifully, I thought.

"Raleigh!" I cried. "How did you get in there?"

His answering gesture and expression meant, so far as I could determine, that he couldn't tell me, or that I couldn't understand.

"But how are you going to get out again?"

He shook his head.

"You mean you're not?"

His lips slowly formed the words, "I don't know."

"You mean you don't know whether you can get out or not?"

"Yes, that's what I mean," his nod said.

I am trying to set this down exactly

as it occurred. I may, of course, not have it exactly correct, but it is near enough.

"But why did you go in?"

Again that gesture from him which might have meant, "You wouldn't understand," but which I think meant, "I know but I can't explain."

"Raleigh!" I cried (and it must be remembered that every time I spoke, of course, my image actually spoke to him although it was facing me and, in the mirror, paying no attention to him), "what shall I do about it? Shall I get some one?"

His quick, excited shaking of his head showed me that that was the last thing he wanted. So I merely stood there and thought for a few moments, bewildered indeed, and quite unable, for a while, to think rationally.

"Raleigh," I finally began, "is the rest of the house in there too?"

"No," he said.

"You mean there's just that room?"

He stretched his arms out the width of the mirror and encircled its heavy frame with his eyes, indicating, I suppose, that there was nothing there but what the mirror encompassed.

Then I had an inspiration.

"What on earth are you going to eat? Or," I added, because it suddenly struck me that he probably had no substance, "don't you have to eat?"

He smiled and indicated that he certainly did have to eat. He pointed at me several times before I grasped his meaning.

"*I* can bring you things to eat?" I exclaimed in wonderment.

He nodded rapidly.

"Do you mean to say you can—can eat the reflection?" I cried.

This time his smile was really one of merriment. But then, gesturing to me to watch him carefully, he went to the reflection of the marble-topped table and tore off a corner of a large magazine lying there; yet the actual magazine, the one in the room with me, remained undisturbed and unchanged. He reached in his pocket, scratched a match on his heel, and set fire to the triangle of paper in his hand. It blazed instantly, and he held it until all but a corner was consumed before he dropped it into a plaster bowl on his table. It was the most bewildering thing to try to think out that I have ever encountered. He had actually destroyed part of the reflection of something which actually existed only here, before me. I couldn't suppress a desire to peer into my own plaster bowl to see if there was charred paper there. It was empty, of course. Yet when I lifted it (and of course my reflection at the same moment lifted the reflected bowl) and turned it upside down, nothing at all fell out of mine, but out of the bowl in the mirror fluttered the black ash and settled on the carpet.

Raleigh, astonishingly enough, gathered them up from my reflected feet, stepped around my image, and deposited them in his fireplace. He was as neat in that world as in this.

Now I see I am setting this down at too great length and I must be briefer, because, after all, my record of astonishment after astonishment is merely repetitious. I shall jot down only two things more that occurred today, and then I shall try to get some sleep.

The first thing is, that I did serve him food. About seven o'clock I asked my housekeeper to serve a supper for two in Raleigh's room, although first, of course, I ascertained if it would be agreeable to him, and he arranged that he would hide from the housekeeper's eyes behind the screen in the reflected room. That was

done, and Mrs. Ellis brought the suppers in and departed without suspecting a thing.

But I might have spared myself the ordering of two suppers. We could have eaten the same one—he eating his first and clearing his reflected plate without touching mine in the least; and then I, from the same heaping plate, eating my fill. But that we did not do; we each had our own, although I later had to carry his apparently untouched portion surreptitiously to the kitchen and burn it in the range. But we did have the same cup of coffee—for experiment's sake. I poured it out. He drank it. Then I drank it, and as I drank, my image went through all the motions with an empty cup.

The second thing that happened was his calling my attention to a manuscript tucked in one of the pigeon-holes of his desk. At his signal, I glanced at it and found that it was by himself and was called *The Metaphysics of the Mirror*. At his request, I have brought it upstairs with me to read. Already I have glanced at it and found it almost incomprehensible. Tomorrow I shall try again, but I doubt if I can do it.

I may as well close this entry with one more little fact I noticed tonight. When I left him, a little while ago, he was ready for bed, and after we had said good-night he opened his windows and put out his light. And although the lights in the real room were still on, the mirror went completely dark!

THURSDAY, 10 p. m.

Nothing at all of any importance has happened today. He is still there, of course, but he has been much less communicative than yesterday and has seemed to want me in the room only at meal times. He is evidently trying to think something out; for most of the time he has been sitting in his big chair with his head on his hand and his brow wrinkled.

I was much concerned, as I lay awake last night, over the question of water and toilet facilities for him; so I went down as early as possible this morning. But it appears that it is quite all right. So long as the lavatory door, in the real room, stands open, the interior of the closet is reflected in the big mirror, and its accommodations become an actuality for him. Should I, however, close the door, his, too, of course, would close. And should he open his while mine remained closed, he would face, so far as I am able to gather (yet without understanding it) nothingness.

Meanwhile, most of today, I have been hard at work on his manuscript. It will require a good many more readings and a lot of hard thought before I shall be able to make a lucid brief of it. But I think I am getting a slight inkling, and I may as well set down what I have so far gleaned.

It seems that he believes in a sort of dualism, in which the universe is made up, not of matter and mind, but what he calls matter-which-can-not-exist-without-mind and matter-which-can-exist-without-mind. Everything that we know and sense, evidently, is in the matter-which-can-not-exist-without-mind class, although he accords complete and tangible existence to the other. Now, so far as I can figure it out—and I don't know yet whether he means it literally or is merely talking more metaphysics—the mirror is a device which can split those two worlds. I presume he means that it can act on reality much as a prism can act on light, splitting it into its component parts; so that we have a perceptible division of mind-matter and pure matter.

Now, he goes on to say, imagine the possibility of a further splitting of the mind-matter world—the world on this side of the mirror (although of course he doesn't actually talk of "sides," because he thinks of these two worlds as co-existent and co-extensive). Suppose you could split that mind-matter—get the mind away, project it to the matter side? Well—I must admit it sounds logical—then you could join the mind with the matter-that-can-exist-without-mind, and there you would be on the other side of the mirror!

And meanwhile, your real body (let me misname it thus), being composed of matter-that-can-not-exist-without-mind, would cease to exist, most naturally.

Let me see if I can put it more clearly. The universe is matter-mind and matter-without-mind, co-existent save in the presence of a mirror which splits them. Split the mind-matter and project the mind through the mirror to what we call the reflection, but which is actually pure matter, and we have created in that reflection what is to all intents and purposes a new reality.

Now, that's quite as far as I can go. I have no idea how that projection is accomplished, although, thinking of it, it certainly seems much more feasible for me to send my mind through a mirror—or just Mind in general—than to walk through it physically, as I first thought Raleigh must have done.

Well, that's all I can write tonight. Tomorrow, perhaps, I'll try the manuscript again.

FRIDAY, 9:30 p. m.

There certainly has been a development today. Raleigh and I have talked with each other!

It happened this way: I was wakened at a quarter after eight this morning by my telephone ringing beside my bed. And to my amazement I heard Raleigh's voice calling me by name and wishing me good morning.

"Raleigh!" I cried. "Are you out?"

"Out where?"

"Out of the mirror!"

He laughed. "No, of course not," he replied. "I'm still 'in the mirror,' as you say, and I'm phoning you from there."

"But how——" I began.

"Silly," he said, "there's a telephone in here, isn't there?"

"Yes," I objected, forgetting everything I had learned, "but it's only the reflection of one."

"It seems to me," Raleigh returned, "that it ought to be quite as real as the match you saw me use, or the meals I've eaten. The only thing that troubles me is why I didn't think of it before."

"But how splendid, Raleigh!" I exclaimed. "Now I can sit in your room, see you, and talk to you at the same time, from your phone into the mirror."

"Not that," he said. "Remember that the phone in this mirror and the one out in the room are one and the same. And you can't talk to yourself over the same phone. There's no connection between receiver and transmitter. . . . Well, that's all now. I'm having some breakfast soon, I trust."

"Very soon, Raleigh," I said, and hung up the receiver having undoubtedly had the first conversation in the history of the world with a man in a mirror. . . .

And now I must record a little thing that happened last Tuesday night but which I did not set down here in my Wednesday entry because only now has it seemed to have any significance. Indeed, I don't believe it entered my memory again until today.

Tuesday evening, it will be remembered, I passed with Raleigh in his

rooms, seeing him for the last time—I was about to write "alive" but that is not what I mean. During the course of our chatter, I happened to pick up a statuette from the central table—I had often seen it there and admired it—and I asked him about it. It is, base and all, about eight inches high, of heavy bronze.

Looking back, I can imagine that he answered me rather curtly. What he said was this: "It was given to me by a woman. It is called Sacred Love." He reached for the wine-bottle.

"I've always been puzzled by that differentiation between Sacred and Profane Love," I began. "What, for example, does——"

"I have no patience with such terminology," he exclaimed. "Let us call this Unattainable Love and have done with it. . . . And let me fill your glass."

That was all, and I let the incident pass from my mind. But it has returned today, because Raleigh has talked with the woman on the telephone and she is coming to see him! Furthermore, it is in some way because of her that he went into that mirror!

I can only hint at the story, because I actually know nothing about it, and I dare not conjecture for fear I should be very wrong and do them both grave injustice. But that the situation has more than a little to do with his exclamation about Unattainable Love, I have no doubt at all. How long they have known each other, why the relationship is incapable of fulfilment, I have no idea. Certainly, knowing Raleigh and being aware of the unreal dream-plane in which he lives, I can readily imagine that things which would in no sense deter a more worldly man from attaining the object of his desires (providing the desires are reciprocated) would appear as insurmountable obstacles to him. Her marriage, for instance, be it ever so unhappy.

Her name is Eleanor, but that is all I know. When Raleigh talked to me today and told me that she was coming tomorrow and that I was to admit her, I asked him if she knew what she was going to expect. He laughed rather bitterly and said, "She has expected it for years. In fact, she's the reason why!"

He said no more, and naturally I could not press the point.

That is all of moment that has happened today.

SATURDAY, 10 p. m.

She has been here to see him.

This morning, when I talked with Raleigh on the telephone, he told me that she was coming about four and asked me if I would try to be downstairs near the front door so that I could let her in unbeknown to the housekeeper. That is what I did, and she came up the steps just as the clock in the lower hall was chiming.

She is, I think, the loveliest woman I have ever seen. I don't mean just physical beauty, either, though heaven knows she has that. But from the tips of her exquisite fingers to the crown of her hair which is of pure, shining silver (though not, I know, from age) she simply radiates sheer loveliness. I can't call her spiritual or ethereal, for she is much too real for that; but there is some quality about her which is not often met with in this day. Oh, they are twin souls all right, those two! Just the very sight of her would do more to convince a disbeliever that Raleigh *could* pass into a mirror, than twenty of his manuscripts.

Which brings me to this which I may as well jot down now. If I have any inkling of what his metaphysics are all about, of course he can't ever leave that mirror! Granted him the power to pro-

ject Mind back into this world, where is the Matter for him to fuse with once more? Gone out of existence by its very definition—Matter-that-can-not-exist-without-Mind! . . . So I have been thinking today, but I haven't dared to ask Raleigh.

To get back to Eleanor. She was gracious—she couldn't be other than that, but she wasted no time on self-introductions or preliminaries. She merely called me by name when I opened the door, gave me her hand, and then said in what was hardly above a whisper, "Take me to him. I must see him at once."

I indicated the stairway and followed her up it, and the moment I unlocked the door she flung her gloves on the floor and rushed across the room, pressing herself against the mirror and crying, "Oh, my dear! My dear!"

Raleigh was there, too, directly inside, his hands on the shoulders of her reflection, and I saw that he was vainly trying to turn that reflection toward him. The kisses she was bestowing on the cold glass were being given to the lips of her own image.

I should have gone then, I know, but I stayed a moment more, just long enough to see her do, in perfect knowledge of what she was doing, what a less understanding person would never have thought of. She turned from the glass and faced the empty room, raising her arms and curving them about the air and upturning her face. In the mirror, Raleigh caught her waiting reflection to him and rained his kisses upon it. He, I knew, was embracing true, warm flesh and blood; she was holding—space!

I went out and shut the door behind me.

For two hours, then, I sat in the room directly under Raleigh's, on the first floor. It was no use to try to do anything, even read. I found I could fix my mind on nothing but those two upstairs; yet I can't say why I was disturbed. Everything so far is all right, and I have been in there twice since then.

The first time was after, as I say, I had been sitting for about two hours. Then I fancied I heard a cry from Raleigh's room. I stood up and listened. I heard nothing for possibly five minutes, and then, most surely, I caught the sounds of sobbing in the room above. I suppose I shouldn't have done it, but I went up the stairs and tapped on the door, opening it at the same moment.

She was all hunched up in the big wing chair by the fireplace. Her hat was off, her hair was in disarray, and she was sobbing into her hands. In the mirror, Raleigh was standing beside the reflection of the chair, but he was facing me and motioning for me to go away. I paid no attention to him, but addressed her.

"Please," I said. "Isn't there anything I can do?"

She shook her head, but her sobs diminished.

"I wondered if you wouldn't like to talk to him," I went on. "There's a telephone in my room."

She shook her head again. "I know his lips!" she cried. "I can read them."

"But wouldn't you like some tea," I pursued, "or a glass of——"

"No! No!" she said, and her sobs broke out again. "Please go away. Please leave us alone."

So I left them. But about half past seven I went in again—knocking first, of course. This time I carried them some supper on a tray. She had dragged the big chair away from the fireplace and had put it directly in front of the mirror and not more than two feet away. She was sitting in it, weeping no longer, and

in the glass Raleigh was sitting on the arm of its reflection.

She didn't move when I entered, but she thanked me graciously and begged me sincerely to pay no more attention to her.

"Please do what you would normally do in the evening," she told me, "and forget all about me. I can let myself out quite easily and I don't want you to wait up until I go. But I do want to thank you for everything you're doing for Mr. Raleigh. It's very difficult for you, I know."

I murmured something and went away. And I have obeyed her request. I've spent the evening here in my room, and I don't know whether she has gone or not. I've heard no sound from downstairs, but I shall not let it worry me; I shall go to bed.

SAME night, 12:30 a. m.
Eleanor has gone into the mirror!

It's quite true—and now what I'm going to do I can't for the life of me imagine. I have been sitting here for half an hour with my brain in an absolute turmoil, trying to think of what is going to become of them—what, indeed, is going to become of me! I can hardly spend the remainder of my days with that secret in my house, harboring it from the world.

It happened like this: Just an hour ago my telephone rang. I was in bed, but not, I think, asleep. I answered it at once and heard Raleigh's voice, saying to me without explanation, "I think you had better come down here."

"What's the matter, Raleigh?" I cried.

"I think you had better come down," he repeated.

So I threw on my dressing-gown and found my slippers and went down immediately. I think I must have had a suspicion as I descended the stairs. It certainly was not fully formed, but it must have been there, because when I had thrown open the door and stepped into the room, I did not glance around at all for Eleanor, but turned directly toward the mirror.

And there she was—inside!

They were standing there facing me, with their arms about each other's waists. He was as stern and straight as I have ever seen him, with his chin lifted as if in a hint of triumphant defiance. She, on the other hand, was ivory-pale, with her eyes half closed as if she were weary to death. But they both looked at me, and as I stood there for a long time with the first of these torturing thoughts beginning to whirl in my mind, they said not one single word to each other or to me, nor did they make the slightest movement.

At length I knew what I was expected to do. They merely wanted to show me that the thing had occurred. They wanted nothing else. They wanted me to look, to realize, and to go.

So go I did—and here I am, alone.

SUNDAY, 5 p. m.

I am writing this in the late afternoon because I am going to bed directly I have finished. I got no sleep at all last night, not a single wink. I rolled and tossed until dawn, trying to come to some decision about Raleigh and Eleanor—for of course they are still there, and likely to say there until they die. (Or don't people ever die in that mirror world?)

I have talked with both of them at great length on the telephone today and I have tried to beseech their help in formulating some conclusion as to their destiny and mine. I have made a hundred suggestions, it seems to me, but to each one of them I have received the same response: "Wait. Please wait." I have begged them to let me call in some of the

scientists from Harvard or Massachusetts Tech, but they have said, "Please wait." I have asked them to let me inform some of their relatives or friends, but they have said the same. I have finally, in desperation, asked Raleigh if it would not be possible, without danger to them, to move the mirror to my little cottage in Maine where life would be less complicated and I could find them, perhaps, some discreet attendant who would care for their wants, but they say: "Wait."

Raleigh seems to think that my worries are in great part financial and has offered to telephone at once to his bank and see what arrangements could be made to allow me to draw money from his account without checks, which of course he can not get to me. But that is not it at all. It is merely that I can not continue much longer to keep this secret. I'm not thinking primarily of the proprieties, for God knows I'm wishing them all the happiness in the——

WISCASSET, Maine. Saturday, five weeks later.

At last, perhaps, I can write a little. Not much, but enough to close this journal and see if I can't, by doing that, write "finis" to the whole adventure. I know it can't be done, but it is a gesture I have wanted to make every day during these awful weeks but which I could not bring myself, mentally or physically, to do.

I slept last night—thanks to the sea pounding outside my windows—the first real sleep in—heavens, how long! So today I think that I can add the last few words to this journal and explain why the entry above was so sharply broken off at ten minutes past five on that Sunday afternoon five weeks ago.

I shall see that old house no more, thank God. I couldn't live in it another day; so I have sold it, and sold most of my furniture, and I have come here to my cottage to live on the little I have. But oh! Police. Reporters. Police. Reporters. Days and days of them until it seemed I would go mad! . . .

But here's the tale:

My pen stopped at the last letter of that word above, because downstairs I heard a noise. It was a shriek from my housekeeper in the lower hall, almost hidden by the sound of heavy footsteps running up the first flight of stairs. I jumped to my feet and threw open the door. The housekeeper was calling my name in a voice of terror, and then, before I could answer her, I heard pounding on Raleigh's door—I had locked it, of course, as I always did.

It took me but a moment to run down my stairs and to see that a man was there on the second floor landing, rattling the knob of Raleigh's door with all his might, shouting "Open up!" and banging the panels with his heavy fist.

I don't even now know who he was. Oh, how many times I've said that! I don't know who he was! I don't know who he was! To police. To reporters. To police. To reporters. Over and over and over again. I don't know who he was! I don't know who Eleanor was! I don't know who he was! Over and over and over again.

I shouted to him. I ran to him and laid hands on his shoulders, but he paid no more attention to me than if I had been a ghost—and I am not strong. He kept up that pounding and shouting and I kept up my shouting and my clawing at his back until, suddenly, he thrust me away so that I went sprawling on the carpet, and then he leaned back and with a mighty kick burst the lock. And the door flew open with a crash.

He leaped into the room screaming "Eleanor!"

Again, again, and again I have said that I don't know what he expected to find, or how he knew she was in my house. I can only report exactly what I saw and heard.

When I picked myself up and got to the opened door, he was standing in the center of the room, staring into the mirror, and his face was the most hideous purple I have ever seen. And in the mirror, far back by the reflected windows, Eleanor and Raleigh were standing, staring out at him, clutched in each other's arms, pale as death itself.

How can I tell what he thought or how much he knew? I can swear that he didn't turn around to face the real windows and see if they were standing there in actuality. He must have known!

He said nothing—absolutely nothing. But all of a sudden his hand went quickly into his side pocket, and just as quickly it came out with a revolver.

Oh, then I leaped! "No! No!" I cried at the top of my voice and jumped to his side, pawing through the air for his revolver arm. But with the other he held me off as easily as if I had been a child, and he took straight aim into the mirror.

I saw Raleigh, then, drop Eleanor from his embrace, and as she sank onto the floor, Raleigh came running toward us with his arms outstretched to their full length and his lips uttering some unheard cry.

But the man fired, and the sound in the room was like a thunderclap. I buried my face in my hands.

But when the next ten seconds brought only silence, I raised my head again—and there in the mirror was a neat and round little hole, shoulder high. And there, just inside the glass was Raleigh, kneeling, with his hands flat against the surface of the mirror, saying something over and over to us. And Eleanor, risen unsteadily to her feet, was coming down the length of the room until she too was just inside, and one of Raleigh's arms went around her.

But then, as we stood there, I saw a look of the utmost horror come into Raleigh's eyes. And I'm afraid, fascinated, that I stared only at that look and paid no attention to what the man beside me was doing. In fact, I didn't realize it until it was all over and he, bursting into an incoherent flood of language, had sunk to the floor in a grovelling heap.

For in that awful moment while I stood and stared, he grabbed the bronze statuette of Sacred Love from the table and hurled it with all his force against the mirror. And, with a sound like the crashing of a hundred tuneless bells, the shining glass came splintering down. . . .

There was nothing there. Nothing.

Nothing but the drab wooden backing of the frame with a round bullet-hole in it and a thousand shivering pieces of the mirror on the floor in front.

And that is all I know.

And this is all I can say: God rest them, wherever they are!

"They were skipping about the snow-lizard, lunging at it with their spiral lances, and leaping back to avoid the darting of its huge and terrible head."

Buccaneers of Venus

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A powerful weird-scientific story by a master of science-fiction—a swift-moving tale of piracy, and weird monsters on another planet

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT GRANDON, young Chicago clubman who had fought his way to the throne of Reabon, mightiest empire of the planet Venus, was honeymooning on the sea-coast with his beautiful young bride, Vernia, Princess of Reabon, when she was carried off by the Huitsenni, a hairless, toothless yellow race of buccaneers against which Grandon had previously formed a secret alliance with four other Venusian rulers.

Grandon instantly set out in pursuit of the pirate fleet in a small fishing-boat, with only one companion, Kantar the Gunner, who was an expert with Venusian torks, or machine-guns. They, too, were captured by the pirates, but managed to escape by diving off the gangplank when the ship docked in the secret port of Huitsen. They were accompanied by San Thoy, one of the pirate commanders who had incurred the disfavor of his superiors because he had attempted to take Vernia away from the others.

Vernia, meanwhile, was taken to the palace of Yin Yin, ruler of Huitsen, where she learned that she had been captured because a huge ransom had been offered for her by Zanaloth, Torrogo of Mernerum, a country adjoining Reabon.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for November

Grandon and Kantar were introduced by San Thoy into the order of Chispoks, or Sea-Rats, a secret society opposed to the administration of Yin Yin. The members of this society were against piracy, and were for legalizing Huitsen among the nations of Venus, so she could enter into peaceful commerce. The Chispoks offered to help Grandon and Kantar to get into the palace, if they would promise to kill Yin Yin. To this they agreed.

In the harem of Yin Yin, Vernia met Narine, the young daughter of Ad of Tyrhana, one of Grandon's imperial allies. The two girls were visited by Yin Yin, who later entertained a guest, Heg, Rogo of the Ibbits, a fur-covered savage race living in the snowy antarctic to the south of Huitsen. Yin Yin sold Narine to the savage chieftain, but as the latter was about to leave with his victim, Grandon entered the room. He struck off the head of Yin Yin, and was attacked by several of the monarch's guards. In the meantime, Kantar, who had been instructed to rescue Vernia while Grandon kept off their enemies, tore down a drape, bundled it around the girl who was standing before it, and fled down a secret passageway.

Grandon, after dispatching his attackers, turned and saw that the room was deserted. Believing that Kantar had rescued Vernia, he was about to re-enter the secret passageway when he heard a cry coming from the outside. Rushing to the window and out on the balcony, he saw Vernia being carried off by the hairy savage chieftain, whose followers waited below, mounted on zandars, strange antarctic riding-animals.

Grandon instantly dropped from balcony to balcony in pursuit, but the savage ruler quickly reached his warriors and galloped away, leaving one of his armed men to prevent Grandon from following.

CHAPTER 14

KANTAR'S BLUNDER

ALTHOUGH Kantar, as soon as he followed Grandon through the panel opening, saw that his sovereign was beset by overwhelming odds, and would have liked nothing better than to join in the swordplay, he was constrained by the strict orders which the Earth-man had given him. His part was to get Vernia out of the palace as quickly as possible.

Peering through the narrow slit between two hangings, he saw a headless yellow body with a scarlet cincture, which identified it as that of Yin Yin. Only a few inches in front of him he noticed a jeweled hand and a slim, white arm. It did not occur to him that there could be any woman other than Vernia in the room. But the thought did come to him that she would surely refuse to leave Grandon —that if he should urge her to go she would undoubtedly countermand the positive instructions which had been given him. He decided to carry her off, and explain afterward.

He thought he could tell precisely where she stood by the position of her hand and arm, and acted accordingly. Suddenly jerking the silken hanging from the bar on which it was draped, he wrapped it around the slender figure, and turning, plunged through the panel opening. Then, carrying his precious burden in his arms, he dashed down the winding stairway. Muffled sounds of terror came from the bundle, but he spoke reassuringly: "Be not afraid, Majesty. It is I, Kantar the Gunner. His Majesty ordered me to carry you hence quickly. Friends are waiting to help us out of the city."

The cries and struggles subsided, and

Kantar quickly reached the bottom of the stairway. Here he found the thalput waiting as he had promised.

"Is Yin Yin dead?" he asked.

"His head and body have just parted company," replied Kantar.

"Thorth be praised! The tyrant is no more! And His Majesty of Reabon?"

"Still fighting when I left. He ordered me to proceed without him, and said that on no account should I wait for him, but should take Her Majesty away from here at once."

"That scarcely comports with our plans, but he has earned the right to be obeyed by all Chispoks. And I'll be on the lookout to help him if he comes later. Follow me."

He opened the panel which led into the small metal-walled room, and there stood the six pseudo-fishermen with their nets. Swiftly they wrapped a net around Kantar's bundle, and another around the gunner. Then shouldering their burdens as before, they filed out into the passageway, the thalput at their heels.

Kantar heard some one coming, and wondered how the two full nets passing out of the palace would be explained. But the thalput was equal to the occasion.

"Take your stale fish and feed them to the ormfs," he cried in a loud voice, "and the next time you try to foist such trash on the thalput of the royal kitchens I'll see that His Majesty learns of it."

A moment later the two bundles were lowered into the boats, the rowers took their places, and the thalput pushed them off. For some time Kantar lay there looking up at the monotonous scenery of planking, piling and stone foundations. They then traversed a narrow passageway between two stone walls, and shortly thereafter shot out under the sky. The gunner recognized the harbor of Huitsen.

A few strokes of the oars took them alongside an anchored boat about twenty-five feet long. It had a small, low cabin, and was fitted with two bat-wing sails. The two bundles were passed up to a stocky yellow man, who carried them, one at a time, into the cabin.

A dim light illuminated the little room, and as Kantar looked up at the man who deposited him there, he recognized San Thoy.

"Both of you must stay wrapped like this for some time," said the former mojak. "Where is Grandon of Terra?"

"Dead or alive, I know not," replied Kantar. "But he slew Yin Yin, and by his command I left him there, still fighting, to bring Her Majesty here."

"The fact that he slew Yin Yin places me doubly in his debt," said San Thoy. "We will wait here for him a while, but we must start in time to get out under cover of darkness, or I fear we shall not get out at all."

"By all means, wait as long as you dare," replied the loyal gunner, "but if he does not come in time, I know his desire would be that we should go on without him."

"I trust that you and Her Majesty will make yourselves as comfortable as possible while I go to keep watch on the deck. Under no circumstances must you make a noise or uncover yourselves. Yin Yin's warriors may board us at any time, and were they to discover our secret we should all die."

He went outside, and remained for some time in low conversation with the six men. Presently Kantar heard another boat come alongside, and scarcely dared to breathe for fear it contained warriors.

There was the sound of some one coming up over the side, and whispering. Then San Thoy came into the cabin.

"It is useless to wait longer," he said. "A brother just came to inform us that

Grandon of Terra is believed to have been carried off by the Ibbits; whether dead or alive, they know not. We will start."

"I'm sure we will be carrying out his wishes by doing that," replied Kantar.

SAN THOY went out on deck again and issued a few commands. The batwing sails were unfurled and the anchor hoisted. To accelerate their progress, for the wind was not strong here in the harbor, the men used oars, while San Thoy went forward to operate the steering-device, which was shaped like an eight-pointed star with a knob on each point and suspended horizontally above the compass. The two rowboats in which the men had come were towed behind.

Presently Kantar knew by the disappearance of the breeze and the faint echoes which followed every sound, that they had entered the subterranean lake. A little later he heard a voice which seemed to come from far above him.

"Ho, there. Who goes?"

"Gar Zin, the fisherman," replied San Thoy, "to catch a killer norgal for the royal table."

"A moment, Gar Zin. It seems your voice has altered considerably. I'll just descend and have a closer look at you."

"As you please, Excellency," San Thoy replied with studied carelessness. "We'll have a bowl of kova in my cabin." He clapped his hands. "Ho, Lin Fan. Prepare kova in the cabin at once for His Excellency, Yin Fu, Guardian of the Gate."

One of the men hurried into the cabin. Peering through the meshes of his net, Kantar saw the man enter. But he did not approach the small fish-oil stove that was fastened to one wall. Instead, he crouched beside the door, a knife gleaming in his hand.

From outside came the creak of pulleys and the thud of feet on the deck. Evidently some one had been lowered to the boat from a station high above it.

"Welcome to my humble ship, Excellency," said San Thoy.

"Umph. It is as I thought. You are not Gar Zin, my old friend. Who are you, and what are you up to?"

San Thoy assumed a confidential tone. "Shh! Not so loud, Excellency. Private business for His Majesty. Come into the cabin and we'll discuss it over a bowl of kova."

"I'll come into the cabin, right enough, but I want none of your kova. Lead on."

"After you, Excellency."

"I said, *lead on!*" There was the sound of a scarbo being whipped from its sheath. "I'll keep this point at your back, and at the first sign of treachery, you die."

"As you wish, Excellency." San Thoy's tone was exceedingly humble.

Peering through the meshes, Kantar saw San Thoy enter the cabin, followed by a large yellow man who wore a purple cloak and a shining helmet of conical shape. In his hand he carried a scarbo, the point of which was directed at San Thoy's back.

Just as Yin Fu stepped through the door, San Thoy threw himself face downward on the floor. At the same moment, a knife flashed from beside the door, and the guardian of the gate collapsed with a grunt of anguish.

San Thoy leaped to his feet. For a moment he bent and held his hand over the heart of the fallen noble. Then he removed the purple cloak and helmet and donned them. Going out on deck, he shouted in excellent imitation of Yin Fu's voice: "It's all right, warriors. Open the gate. I'm going out with my old friend, Gar Zin, to drink a bowl or two with him and have a try at a norgal. Look well to your tasks until I return."

There followed a whirring of hidden machinery, and a sliding sound as of stone over metal. Then the rowers bent to their oars. San Thoy, meanwhile, discarded helmet and cloak in the cabin, and hurried out to take his place on the steersman's seat. Soon the boat began rocking with considerable violence. Shortly thereafter the rowers ceased their efforts, and Kantar knew that they were now afloat on the open Azpok, and plunging forward under the impetus of a stiff breeze.

Presently San Thoy gave the steersman's seat to another, and entered the cabin. "We'll have to put out the light for a while," he said. "They will use a glass on us from the shore, and we don't want them to know in which direction we are going. At least you will not have to stay trussed up in these nets any longer, and I can dispose of that," pointing to the corpse of Yin Fu. He looked around the cabin for a moment as if to fix the location of everything in his mind. Then he put out the light, and the gunner heard him dragging his grisly burden out of the cabin, heard a splash, and knew that the remains of Yin Fu had gone to feed the denizens of the Azpok.

Kantar quickly rolled out of his net, and went over to where his precious bundle lay. "If you don't mind, I'll help you out of this, Your Majesty," he said. "I'm sure you will be more comfortable."

"I'm sure I shall," was the reply. "You have been very kind."

The gunner was startled at sound of the voice. It did not sound like that of Vernia. But he thought she might have taken cold from this unwonted exposure. Then, too, her voice would sound differently, muffled in the hanging.

"You have been very brave, Majesty," he replied, as he unwound the net. "Perhaps this silk around you will add to your comfort. The breeze is chill."

He adjusted the silken drape around the shapely shoulders. A soft hand touched his and thrilled him unaccountably. It gave him rather a guilty feeling, that thrill, but he could no more help it than he could help breathing.

"Ho, Gunner. Can you help me with the boat? The crew is leaving."

"Coming, San Thoy," was the reply. He felt his way to the door in the pitch blackness, then stepped out on deck. Outside it was fully as dark as in the cabin. Nothing whatever was visible except the occasional glint of a star through a rent in the ever-present cloud envelope.

A hand was laid on his arm. "Let me guide you," said San Thoy, whose cat-like pupils enabled him to see by the faint flashes of starlight. "Sit here, so, and take these ropes in your hands. Now pull the right or left rope, or both, as I may direct. I will steer."

"Where are the brothers?" asked Kantar.

"They were leaving when I called you. They will reach the two boats, and return to Huitsen by a roundabout way known only to the Chispoks."

"I trust that they will not lose their lives for this night's work."

"There is little danger. Their part in the affair is not known. Also, it is possible that the Chispoks may be in power when they return."

"But what of you?"

"I will accompany you back to Reabon. In Huitsen I am a fugitive, but in your country I feel that I shall be welcome after this night's work. Later, if and when the Chispoks assume control of Huitsen, I shall return."

"No one will be more welcome," replied the gunner, "unless it be Grandon of Terra himself."

They sailed on and on into the moonless Zorovian night, and Kantar, who was aware of the almost uncanny skill with which the Huitsenni navigated their boats, did not doubt that they were heading in the right direction.

Presently San Thoy said: "We could have a light now, as we are out of sight from shore. But it is scarcely worth while, as morning will soon dawn.

A few moments later a faint blood-orange tint marked the outlines of the eastern horizon, swiftly followed by the full blaze of cloud-filtered morning light.

"There are provisions and kova in the cabin," said San Thoy. "Perhaps you will prepare breakfast for Her Majesty. It is best that I continue to steer for yet a while. The breeze is quite steady, now, so you may lash the ropes."

"If my nose doesn't deceive me," replied the gunner, who was nearer to the cabin than San Thoy, "breakfast is already being prepared. However, I'll go and assist."

Making the two ropes fast, he got up and went to the cabin. Pausing to make obeisance to his Torroga, he gasped in sudden astonishment at sight of a slender, dark-haired girl bending over the fish-oil burner, from the top of which came the fragrant aroma of brewing kova and the savory odor of a well-seasoned meat and mushroom stew. As the morning was chill, the girl still wore the silken curtain draped around her, concealing her garments but not the graceful lines of her slim body.

"Bones of Thorth!" he exclaimed. "Who are you?"

She looked up, her face slightly flushed by the heat from the stove, and Kantar gasped again; for never, he thought, had he seen a face so beautiful. At first her eyes flashed imperiously, almost angrily, at the abruptness and bluntness of his question. But suddenly the icy look melted, was replaced by a winning smile.

"My name is Narine," she replied. "And you, I believe, are Kantar the Gunner."

Kantar's wonder deepened. For a moment he was wholly under the spell of those big brown eyes. Then he remembered his duty—the trust with which his sovereign had charged him.

"Where is Her Majesty of Reabon?" he asked. "And how did you get on this boat?"

"Her Majesty," replied Narine, "was watching the brilliant sword-play of her valiant husband when last I saw her. As for your last question, who should know more about how I got here than you, who brought me?"

"*I* brought you!" His heart sank. "Then I have failed in my trust."

Instantly she saw the look of dejection on his face, and answered with one of sympathy.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I see now that there has been a dreadful mistake. Would that I had known this when you seized me there in the seraglio! Her Majesty had mentioned your name to me. We had planned to escape together. But naturally I did not know His Majesty's plans—or yours. When you told me your name and asked me to be quiet I believed that it was your intention to rescue me—that Grandon of Terra would look out for his own."

"So he would, ordinarily," replied Kantar. "But he was sorely beset. My orders were to bring away his wife; to stay out of the fight for that sole purpose, no matter how the odds went against him. And I brought you!"

"I'm dreadfully sorry——" she began.

"Sorry! You should have known. Didn't I address you as 'Your Majesty'?

Did not that tell you whom I believed I was carrying?"

"Truly it didn't. I thought you had taken me for a torroga instead of—that is——"

"I take you for a torroga?" He laughed mirthlessly. "You, a mere slip of a girl?"

"I'm eighteen," she retorted.

"So? And what of it? I would never take *you* for a torroga."

For a moment the shadow of a smile hovered on her features. But it only angered him the more. He had made a mistake, a most horrible mistake which he felt that Grandon, if still alive, could never pardon—a mistake, moreover, for which he felt positive he could never forgive himself. A thousand fears assailed him. Torturing pictures flashed through his mind. Grandon dead, his head adorning a pike before the Ibbit palace, or if alive, a slave of the savage chieftain from the Mountains of Eternal Snow. Vernia the plaything of this barbarous rogo, or, if she had been left in the seraglio, of Yin Yin's successor! For a moment he struggled to master his unreasoning anger against this girl who had been the unwitting cause of his failure to keep trust. Then he said: "From what country do you hail?"

"From Tyrhana," she replied. "Won't you sit down at the table and let me serve you?"

"Why, yes," he answered. "I'll admit that I'm hungry, thirsty and weary."

She set food and drink before him. He sipped his kova. "You brew an excellent bowl," he told her, and tasting his stew: "This food is not half bad."

She smiled. "The Tyrhanians are a maritime people," she replied, "and should know how to prepare seamen's rations."

"I forgot," he said. "San Thoy must be hungry. I'll take food and drink to him before I begin."

"No, let me. I've been resting all night, and I'll confess that I tasted the stew and the kova." She set the things on a tray and went out, while the gunner addressed himself to his provender. Presently she returned, poured herself a bowl of kova, and took a helping of stew. Then she sat down opposite him.

"A lovely morning," she remarked.

"Is it?" he replied, absently. "I've been thinking about you, wondering what I'm going to do with you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see I haven't time to take you all the way to Tyrhana. I must go back to Huitsen, to do what I can to help Their Majesties of Reabon, if indeed they are not beyond all human help."

"Perhaps I could get you some assistance from Tyrhana," she suggested. "You see my father—that is——"

"No use," he replied. "Tyrhana is on the other side of the world. By the time we went there and returned——"

"But Tyrhana has great fleets, even now, scouring every sea on the globe in search of—of a lost princess."

"A lost princess!"

"Yes. Some time ago the Torrogini set sail in one of her father's battleships. She has not been heard from, since. Naturally, the Torrogo, who loves his daughters beyond all else, is bending every effort to find her."

"Naturally," replied Kantar. "But the chances are much against our meeting any of his ships on the broad Azpok."

"You forget," reminded Narine, "that Tyrhana has the mightiest navy on all Zorovia."

"Reabon has a navy second only to that of Tyrhana," replied Kantar, "and her ships are now scouring the Azpok; yet I

do not place much reliance on the chance of meeting any of them. Besides——"

He was interrupted by a shout from San Thoy. "Gunner. Bring the glass. I believe we are pursued."

Kantar snatched the spy-glass from the rack behind him and hurried out on deck. He saw a ship coming from the southwest, and a sail looming above the southeast horizon. Quickly focusing the glass on the sail, he saw a lookout at the masthead, his glass trained directly on them. A glimpse at the other ship was sufficient to show him that they were being chased from this quarter. Even as he looked, two mattork crews were going into action on the forward deck. A moment later, a shell screamed overhead, and another exploded in the water about two hundred feet behind them.

"Poor marksmanship," he commented coolly. "But I suppose they'll get the range presently. Would that I had a mattork with which to reply!"

"We have two," said San Thoy, "one fore and one aft. Pull up the ring in the after-deck."

KANTAR hurried back and did as requested. The square of the deck to which the ring was attached came up and tilted forward. It was plated beneath with metal, forming a bullet-proof shield. And behind this shield there appeared a shiny new mattork, mounted on its tripod, with cases for the projectile clips and gas clips.

Quickly the gunner opened the breech, inserting a gas clip and a shell clip marked "explosive." There were other shell clips marked "solid," but for the present, he ignored these. Closing the breech, he knelt, and taking careful aim, pressed the firing-button. One of the mattork crews on the approaching ship disappeared a moment later, as if by magic.

The shells from the other mattork, as well as from the heavier turret mattorks of the pursuing craft, were screaming around them in vast numbers, and kicking up tremendous geysers in the sea on all sides. He heard a voice at his side: "May I help you?" Turning, he looked into the wistful brown eyes of Narine. She did not appear to realize their danger, for there was no trace of fear in her expression. "I can hand you the clips."

"Get back into the cabin, you little fool!" he told her. Not waiting to see if she would obey, he once more turned his attention to the enemy. A second well-placed shot wiped out the other mattork crew, and he noted with grim satisfaction that no more came out on the deck. Perhaps the pirates realized now with whom they had to deal. The heavier turret mattorks, though their projectiles could do incalculably greater damage, could not be aimed nearly so accurately as the lighter deck weapons such as he used.

By this time the other pirate ship was in full view. Evidently its commander had seen what happened on the other vessel, for he ordered out only one deck mattork crew. The gunner quickly obliterated it, and had the satisfaction of seeing that this commander, also, was wise enough to use only his turret mattorks thereafter.

"Splendid shooting." Again he heard that voice behind him.

He turned savagely. "I thought I told you——"

"Very well. I'll go. You needn't glare at me so. Besides, if one of those big shells should strike us, the cabin would be no safer than the deck. I'll go forward and talk to San Thoy, who can't be more disagreeable."

Kantar removed the clip of explosive shells and inserted one of solid shot. He

would try to let some water into these ships. That would slow them up. He took aim, and held his finger on the firing-button. The weapon poured forth a steady stream of projectiles. When the clip was empty, he inserted another, and riddled the other ship below the water line. The enemy shells were screaming closer, and in larger numbers. Only one shell, he knew, properly placed, would completely destroy their little craft.

Suddenly he heard their own forward mattork go into action. Looking back over the low roof of the cabin he saw that San Thoy was still steering. Then he knew that Narine was operating that mattork. Moreover, she was using explosive shells, and had scored several hits.

Having punctured both ships below their water lines, Kantar decided to try to cripple the masts. Accordingly he reloaded, this time with explosive shells. As he bent to his task, his hands worked almost mechanically. He was thinking, not of their danger, not even of Grandon and Vernia. Strange to say, the thought that dominated his mind at that moment was, that Narine was very beautiful.

He was suddenly recalled to stark reality as a solid projectile struck their own mast, carrying it overboard, and leaving them at the mercy of their pursuers.

CHAPTER 15

BEASTS OF THE ANTARCTIC

ALTHOUGH he plainly saw the Ibbit warrior left to slay him by the savage chieftain who had abducted Vernia, Grandon continued to drop swiftly from balcony to balcony as if contemptuous of his furry enemy. As his feet struck the lowest balcony, the long lance with its corkscrew head was thrust at him, and he now saw its purpose and how deadly it could be, for the warrior pulled a small lever like a trigger, as he thrust, and the head whirled so rapidly that its outlines blurred.

He leaped lightly aside just in time to avoid that whirling deadly point. Then, before the Ibbit could draw it back for a second thrust, he whipped out his scarbo, and extending the point, dived straight over the railing at his enemy.

Taken completely by surprize at this daring and desperate move of the Earthman, the furry fighter tried to dodge the swiftly descending point. But he moved tōo late. With the full weight of Grandon behind it, the blade of the scarbo was driven through his body up to the hilt, and he lunged out of the saddle.

Grandon and the corpse of his would-be slayer struck the ground together. Withdrawing his scarbo, the Earth-man sprang to his feet. To his consternation, he saw that the blade had been snapped off about ten inches from the hilt. Then he noticed that his fallen foe wore a scarbo, and quickly appropriated it. He also took his huge cloak and hood of zandar fur, his long fur boots and gauntlets, and his lance.

By this time Heg, Rogo of the Ibbits, and his warriors, were half-way to the city gate. Grandon knew that the only possible way to catch them would be for him to mount and ride the strange and formidable-looking beast whose rider he had just slain. The creature was evidently well trained; for despite the fight which had brought it a change of masters, it kept its place beneath the balcony, complacently chewing its cud.

On Earth, Grandon had been accounted a good rider, but here were a beast and equipment both of which were new to him. The savage-looking mount was saddled, but wore neither bridle nor halter. He had no idea how it could be guided,

started or stopped, but there was nothing for it except to climb into the saddle and investigate. This he did.

"Go ahead," he said, in patoa. Without moving, the beast continued its contented cud-chewing. Instinctively, he dug his heels into its sides as if he had worn spurs. So suddenly that he was almost unseated, the zandar sprang forward. But it was going in the wrong direction. How to turn it was the next problem. He tried slapping its neck, first on one side, then on the other, without effect. Then he tried pressing alternately with the right and left knees with no result. Baffled, he grasped the creature's mane, determined to spring from the saddle and follow the Ibbits on foot. Instantly the beast slowed down and stopped.

If he could only find out how to turn the creature! Once more he dug his heels into its sides and the animal sprang forward. He heard some one shout, and turned to see who it was. A group of Huitsenni had discovered the dead Ibbit beneath the balcony. But when he turned, he advanced the right foot and drew back the left. Instantly the zandar whirled to the left. Quickly he returned his feet to the normal position, whereupon the beast settled down to a straight course. He advanced his left foot and drew back his right, and the zandar turned to the right. Now able to guide his strange mount, he set off in swift pursuit of the Ibbits.

The hoofs of his speeding zandar beat a rumbling tattoo on the planking of the broad street, and he dug his heels into its sides to urge it to greater efforts. The Ibbits, he observed, had been stopped at the city gate. The mojak of the guard was evidently suspicious because of their abrupt departure.

Grandon wondered if the body of Yin Yin had been discovered. Probably not, he thought, as the room in which he had been slain was segregated from the others; and of those who had witnessed his death, there had been none left alive to carry the news. It would be discovered eventually, of course. But in the meantime, the Ibbits might be well away from the city.

HE WAS about a quarter of a mile from the party of Ibbits he was striving to catch when he saw the gates thrown open. A moment later, the boom of a mattork sounded from the direction of the palace, and a shell screamed over his head. Then he knew that the body of Yin Yin had been discovered. The firing of the mattork was evidently a signal to the mojak of the guard, who threw a party of his warriors in front of the Ibbits and tried to close the gates.

Instantly, the Ibbits couched their long lances, and charged. There was a popping of tork fire from the thin line of guards, but they were swept away like straws before a gale. Some were trampled underfoot, some gored by the horns of the charging beasts, and the rest impaled and swung off their feet on the long lances, to be thrown over the heads of the first-line riders and trampled beneath the hoofs of the cavalcade that followed.

In his anxiety to catch that charging column, Grandon dug his heels into the ribs of his mount with all his might. But the beast, evidently traveling at its utmost speed already, did not respond in any way except to grunt angrily.

He arrived at the gate about a hundred yards behind the last Ibbit in the column, in a hail of mattork shells from the palace. A single man barred his way—the mojak. Evidently all the others had been slain.

Elevating the muzzle of his tork, the officer sent a bullet uncomfortably close to Grandon's ear. Couching his lance, he pulled back the lever and the corkscrew

head began revolving with terrific speed. It struck the mojak in the middle, and instantly drilled through him, up to the knob. Not knowing how to release his weapon from the body, Grandon dropped it and stooping from the saddle, caught up another which was lying beside a dead Ibbit. With this he experimented as he hurried forward to join the furry savages. He found that when the lever was pulled back the head revolved clockwise, literally screwing itself into its victim. When the lever was perpendicular to the shaft, it stopped, but when it was pushed forward, the head immediately revolved in a counter-clockwise direction, thus swiftly unscrewing itself from anything in which it might be imbedded. This explained how the Ibbits were able to impale their victims and then hurl them over their heads without losing their lances.

The last faint glow from the city lights was disappearing as Grandon caught up with the rear guard of the Ibbits. Now, at intervals of about fifty feet in the column, riders lighted torches. Muffled up as he was, however, with the hood throwing his features into shadow, Grandon did not fear recognition unless the sound of his voice or his accent should make some one suspicious. Suddenly a rider beside him turned and put him to the test: "Did you slay the strange warrior?" he asked.

Grandon pretended to be seized with a fit of coughing. Then, in the rasping tones of a man whose vocal cords have not yet recovered from such an attack, he replied: "I ran him through the heart. He will trouble us no more."

"Good!" exclaimed the rider, evidently unsuspicious. "His Majesty was worried about that fellow. He feared that he would find a way to follow and come upon him by stealth. You will be well rewarded."

Grandon smiled to himself, and made no further comment. Far up near the front of the column he saw a rider carrying a fur-covered bundle which he believed to be Vernia. But he did not deem it advisable to ride too near the Rogo just yet. There might be questions to answer, and he felt sure that, sooner or later, his voice would betray him unless he could manage to keep from speaking.

PRESENTLY they entered a belt of tall trees, primitive conifers, where the trail began to slant sharply upward. Here the beasts slowed down to a walk, though they did not seem greatly inconvenienced by the steepness of the ascent.

As they climbed higher and higher, the air kept growing colder, until Grandon, who had been uncomfortably warm in his furs when on the low ground, was now thankful for them. Soon he noticed that the ground was powdered with a white substance. It was snow, the first he had seen on Venus. Also, he began to be aware of furtive, slinking forms flitting among the tree trunks, trotting beside the cavalcade. Their eyes glowed weirdly green in the torchlight, but it was some time before he could make out what they were. Then one, bolder than the rest, approached to within fifty feet of the riders, and he got a good look at it. It was a white awoo. Some time later he caught sight of a white marmelot, tearing at the carcass of some beast it had slain. And he began to wonder if all creatures, here in the Zorovian antarctic, were white.

The snow grew deeper as they advanced, and the trees more stunted. Presently they crossed a narrow ridge and filed out onto level ground—a snow-covered plateau, its bleak surface swept by a bitterly cold wind laden with powdered ice

particles that pricked the skin like needles. Here, despite the deep snow, the zandars made good progress. This was their natural habitat, and they were equipped for it. Their broad, three-toed feet kept them from sinking deeply, and with their thick, silky coats, Grandon judged that they were more comfortable than in the lower, warmer country.

All through the night, the shaggy beasts kept up their tireless pace. But when morning dawned, the cavalcade halted in a little clump of stunted trees that afforded some protection from the wind, for rest and refreshment.

The zandars, with their saddles still on them, were turned loose to shift for themselves. Grandon saw them eagerly devouring a species of purple moss that grew on top of the snow and sent long, thread-like roots to the soil, far below. They also browsed on such aromatic shoots as they were able to reach on the lower branches of the trees.

Soon the Ibbits had a fire crackling. Then two huge pots were set upon it and snow was shoveled into them to melt. As soon as sufficient water was thus obtained, strips of frozen meat were dropped into the larger of the two pots, and chopped kova roots into the smaller. Vernia was placed near the fire. The rogo sat near her, endeavoring to engage her in conversation, but without success. On the other side of the fire the warriors sprawled in a semicircle, chatting, laughing and eagerly watching the operations of two of their number who were acting as cooks.

With the coming of the dawn, Grandon had been especially careful to keep his hood pulled forward, so that his features would not be noticed. Now, as he sat among the warriors, he kept his head bowed as an additional precaution.

Presently the two cooks went among the men, serving the stewed meat and steaming bowls of kova. Grandon found the meat tough and rather tasteless, but welcome, nevertheless, after his long ride. The kova was well brewed, and refreshing.

After they had eaten and drunk, the warriors stretched out in the snow to sleep. Grandon, perforce, followed their example for fear of becoming conspicuous, but managed to turn his head so that he could watch Vernia and the Rogo. The chieftain, after unsuccessfully urging his fair prisoner to get some rest, lay down himself. As soon as it appeared that he was asleep, Grandon drew back his hood, then raised one arm to attract the attention of Vernia, who sat staring moodily into the fire. Her eyes attracted by the motion of the arm, she glanced toward him, then smothered an exclamation of surprize and pleasure. Instantly he whipped the hood back over his face and lowered his arm.

Now, seeing that she was covertly watching him, he began slowly rolling away from the others, and motioned to her to edge away from beside the fire at the same time. He hoped that if they could get away from the sleepers with sufficient stealth they could catch two of the grazing zandars and put a considerable distance between themselves and the Ibbits before the ruse would be discovered.

But his plans were suddenly upset by an agonized bellowing from one of the zandars, followed by a tremendous hissing sound which brought every warrior to his feet. Grandon sprang erect with the others, and saw a monster with a gigantic, lizard-like body to which was attached a scaly serpentine neck and head, biting immense mouthfuls of flesh from the zandar it had just struck down, and which it was holding beneath one huge

front claw. Save for its color—for its body was completely covered by gleaming white scales—it might have been a silticum, one of those dangerous giant lizards he had first encountered in the fern forests of Reabon.

"A posilticum! A posilticum!" shouted the warriors. Catching up their spiral-pointed spears, they charged the monster.

The word "po" means "snow" in patoa, so Grandon quickly recognized the import of the name, which might be translated "snow-lizard," or "snow-dragon."

Like the others, Grandon caught up his lance, and was about to join them in their attack on the monster, when another idea suddenly came to him. He noticed that the Rogo of the Ibbits, although he had sprung to his feet, had not moved from his place beside Vernia. The chieftain noticed his hesitation at the same time, and cried: "What! Does a warrior of mine fear a posilticum? Go at once with the others, or stay to receive your Rogo's blade."

Nothing could have suited Grandon better. Flinging down his lance, he whipped out his scarbo and leaped across the dying embers of the fire. The chieftain was evidently a good scarboman as Ibbits go, for it appeared that he thought to make short work of Grandon as he struck out with his own blade. It was a cut for the head, which the Earth-man parried. Countering with the same stroke, he found the blade of the Rogo there to meet his. Leaping back to avoid a horizontal blow at the neck, he suddenly changed from the well-established Zorovian practise of using the scarbo as a cutting weapon, and presented his point, lunging for the breast of the barbarian.

Heg was not prepared for this innovation. Nor had he time to come on guard after the terrific slash he had directed at Grandon's neck. The Earth-man's blade tore through his heart, and he toppled backward, dead.

A QUICK glance around showed Grandon that his duel with the furry Rogo had not been observed by the others, all of whom were skipping about the posilticum, lunging at it with their spiral lances, and leaping back to avoid the darting of its huge and terrible head. The noise they made, the hissing of the posilticum, the bellowing of frightened zandars, and the shouts of the Ibbits, had drowned all sound of the clashing scarbos.

"Come," said Grandon, cleaning and sheathing his blade and catching up his lance. "Now is our chance."

Hand in hand, he and Vernia ran to where a group of frightened zandars cowered together as if for mutual protection. He helped her to mount one of the shaggy beasts, and gave her swift instructions for riding it. Then he leaped to the back of another, and they were off.

As soon as they left the shelter of the trees, the cold wind and stinging snow particles buffeted them unmercifully. They had not been gone more than a few minutes when a terrific blizzard swept down on them. Grandon laid their course in the direction he judged to be northwest, intending to circle Huitsen and make for the shore of the Azpok. He believed that a half-day's ride would take them to the edge of the plateau, and that by descending for a few miles they could find relief from the cold and snow.

But they rode more than a half-day without seeing any sign of the slope for which they were searching. Then a steep cliff, the summit of which was invisible in the whirling cloud of snowflakes, suddenly loomed ahead. They rode up to its base, and, skirting it for some distance, came at length to a dark opening in the rock, half closed by a snow drift. By this

time, the zandars, which had traveled nearly all night and half the day with only an hour's rest, began to balk, and Grandon judged that it was best to permit them to rest, and at the same time take advantage of this natural shelter.

He accordingly dismounted, and leaving Vernia to watch the two beasts, cut a path through the snow into the cave with the aid of the whirling spiral point of his lance. Then, lighting his small flame-maker, and keeping the lance in readiness for an attack by a possible unseen enemy, he explored the place. He found himself in a room about twenty feet wide and fifty long, evidently chiseled from the rock by some prehistoric race, as it had the appearance of having been untenanted for ages. Mixed with the dust and litter of the ages, which strewed the floor, were a few partly calcined bones and some fragments of pottery, which showed that the primitives who had once lived here were acquainted with the use of fire.

Having satisfied himself that the place was untenanted, Grandon went back for Vernia and the two beasts. The zandars seemed glad for this shelter from the storm, and lay down immediately, to rest and chew their cuds.

Gathering some bits of dried wood from the debris on the floor, Grandon made a small cooking-fire near the entrance. As he had no large pots, he grilled some of the frozen meat from the saddle-bags over the coals, and they made kova in the two copper drinking-bowls which were part of the equipment in the saddle-bags of the Ibbits.

Having eaten and drunk, they snuggled themselves in their furs, and it was not long before both, weary with the long ordeal through which they had passed, were asleep.

VERNIA was the first to waken. She made two discoveries in rapid succession—first that a new day had dawned, and second that their mounts were not in the cave.

"Bob!" she cried. "The zandars are gone!"

He sat up and yawned. "Yes, dear? Oh, the zandars. They've probably gone out to get their breakfast. I'll go and round them up."

"I'll help you."

"No, you'd better stay here where it's safe and warm."

"But I'll be all right, Bob. I have my furs."

Together they went outside, after Grandon did a little preliminary shoveling with his lance. The storm had passed, succeeded by a calm, bitter cold that was even more penetrating than the wind of the day before.

"No tracks," said Grandon. "They must have left before the blizzard was over. Looks as if we're in for it."

"Oh, Bob, what will we do?"

"Nothing to do but strike out on foot if we can't find them. But we may as well have a look around first. You wait here, and I'll follow the cliff toward the south for a little way. I noticed quite a bit of purple moss growing there yesterday, and those beasts may have remembered, and gone back for it."

"Just in case they went the other way, I'll take a look in that direction," said Vernia.

"Better wait here. It will be safer."

"I don't see why. I won't go far, and I feel the need of a tramp before breakfast. Besides, the beasts may have gone toward the north, in which case we will save time by searching in both directions at once. Go ahead, and don't worry about me."

"Well, if you must. But don't go far, and don't be long."

She watched him for a moment as he strode off along the cliff, then turned and started in the opposite direction. She had gone only a short distance when her attention was attracted by what looked like the prickly segment of a species of Zorovian cactus projecting from behind a bend in the wall.

Puzzled, she walked forward to investigate, but scarcely had she rounded the bend, ere an immense white monster with eight bristly white legs ending in green claws, and a long, jointed tail, darted out and seized her with a pair of huge green chelæ, much like the pincers of a lobster. It was one of these that she had mistaken for a segment of cactus. Running swiftly backward, it carried her into a large cave.

Through the center of the cave, from side to side, was stretched an immense web of rope-thick strands, coated with a gleaming, sticky-looking substance. And suspended in one corner of this hung one of the zandars. Beside the helpless beast was a ball about ten feet in diameter, woven of the same gleaming strands. The other zandar hung in a similar meshwork, near the center of the web.

So suddenly had it all happened that Vernia had time to utter but one smothered scream of terror as she was dragged into the cave. Nor could she make any move to defend herself. The huge chelæ held her like the jaws of a vise, their coarse, spiny hairs piercing her flesh through the heavy cloak she wore.

Holding her thus, the monster stopped, and standing on four of its legs, used the other four to draw a sticky white cord from beneath its abdomen and swiftly weave it around her, until she was scarcely able to move a finger. Then it ran up the web to the corner where the zandar hung beside the white ball, and fastened her next to the helpless beast.

Having shaken the web several times to make sure that she was fastened securely, the gigantic strid, or spinner-scorpion, for such she recognized it to be, returned to the zandar near the center, and settled down over it to feed. As the wretched beast made no outcry, it was evident that it had either been paralyzed by the terrible telson, the poisonous sting at the end of the jointed tail, or slain by the immense chelæ.

For some time, Vernia watched the monster at its bloody feast. Then her attention was attracted by a rustling sound quite near her. She turned, and saw that it came from the white ball beside which she was suspended. Something, many things, were moving inside that ball.

Presently there was a sound as of tearing fabric. A hole appeared in the ball, and out of it came a pair of wiggling, hairy chelæ, small replicas of those of the mother scorpion. They were followed by an armored head in which were set three pairs of glowing eyes, blinking dully out at the world for the first time. It was then that Vernia realized what was in store for her. The monster had suspended both her and the zandar beside its cocoon as food for her young when they should break through the shell.

Even as this horrible realization came to her, the first young strid forced its way through the opening, and came ambling across the web toward her on its eight hairy legs.

Read about Grandon's battle to the death with the terrible, web-spinning scorpion and its ferocious offspring, and the exciting events that follow, in the March issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale February 1st.

The Cripple

By MAURICE LEVEL

A grim, tragic story about a French peasant who stood helpless while a girl died for lack of his aid

BECAUSE he knew good manners, and although there was no one present but Farmer Galot, Trache said on entering:

"Good day, gentlemen!"

"You again!" growled Galot, without turning round.

"To be sure," replied Trache.

He raised his two maimed hands, as if explaining, by their very appearance, his instructions.

Two years ago, in harvest-time, a threshing-machine had caught him up and, by a miracle, dashed him to the ground again instead of crushing him to death. They had borne him off, covered with blood, shrieking, with arms mangled, a rib smashed in, and spitting out his teeth. There remained from the accident a certain dullness of intellect, short breath, a whistling sound which seemed to grope for words at the bottom of his chest, scrape them out of his throat and jumble them up as they passed his bare gums, and a pair of crooked hands which he held out before him in an awkward and apprehensive manner.

"Well, what is it you want?" snapped Galot.

"My compensation money," answered Trache with a weak smile.

"Compensation money! I haven't owed you anything for a long time. There's nothing the matter with you now but laziness and a bad disposition. To begin with, you were drunk when the thing happened. I needn't have given you anything."

"I was *not* drunk," said Trache quietly.

The farmer lost all patience.

"At this moment you can use your hands as well as anybody. You keep up the sham before people, but when you are alone you do what you like with them."

"I don't move them then; I can't," mumbled Trache.

"I tell you, you are an impostor, a trickster, a rascal; I say that you are fleecing me because I have not been firmer with you, that you are making a little fortune out of my money, but that you shall not have another cent. There, that's final. Do you understand?"

"Yes, from your point of view," assented Trache without moving.

Galot flung his cap on the table and began to pace the room with long strides.

Trache shook his head and hunched up his shoulders. At last Galot squared up before him.

"How much do you want to settle for good and all? Suppose we say five hundred francs and make an end of it?"

"I want what is due to me according to the judgment of the court."

Galot became transported with rage:

"Ne'er-do-well, lazy-bones, good-for-nothing; I know what you told the court through the mouth of your doctor, and why you would not let mine examine you."

"It was upon the sworn evidence of the doctors that the case was decided," observed the cripple.

"Ah, it isn't they who have to pay!"

sneered Galot. "Let me see your hands. . . . Let me look, I say: I know something about injuries."

Trache stretched out his arms and presented the wrists. Galot took them between his heavy hands, turned them over, turned them back, feeling the bones and the fleshy parts, as he would have done with cattle at a fair. Now and then Trache made a wry face and drew back his shoulder. At last Galot pushed him away with brutal force.

"You are artful, cunning. But look out for yourself: I am keeping my eye on you, and when I have found you out, look out for yourself! You will end by laughing on the other side of your face, and to get your living you will have to work—you hear what I say?—to work."

"I should like nothing better," sighed the cripple.

Pale with wrath, Galot emptied a purse of silver money on the table, counted it and pushed it toward him.

"There's your money; now be off."

"If you would be so good as to put it in my blouse," suggested Trache, "seeing that I can't do it myself. . . ."

Then he said, as on entering: "Good day, gentlemen," and with stuffed pocket, shaking head and unsteady step, he took his departure.

TO RETURN to his lodging he had to pass along the riverside. In the fields the patient oxen trudged on their way. Laborers were binding the sheaves amid the shocks of corn; and across the flickering haze of the sultry air the barking of dogs came with softened intonation.

Near a bend of the river, where it deepened into a little pool, a woman was washing linen. The water ran at her feet, flecked with foam and in places clouded with a pearly tint.

"Well, are things going as you wish, Françoise?" asked Trache.

"Oh, well enough," said she. "And you?"

"The same as usual . . . with my miserable hands."

He sighed, and the coins jingled under his blouse. Françoise winked at him.

"All the same it isn't so bad—what the threshing-machine has done for you, eh? . . . And then, to be sure, it's only right; Galot can well afford to pay."

"If I wasn't crippled for life, I wouldn't ask for anything."

Thereupon she began to laugh, with shoulders raised and mallet held aloft. She was a handsome girl, and even a good girl, and more than once he had talked to her in the meadow, but now he reddened with anger.

"What is the matter with you all—dropping hints and poking your fun at me?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If I gossip it's only for the fun of gossiping."

He sat down near her, mollified, and listened as she beat her linen. Then, wanting to smoke, and unable to use his helpless hands, he asked her:

"Would you mind getting my pouch out of my pocket and filling my pipe for me?"

She wiped her hands on her apron, searched in his blouse, filled his pipe, struck a match and, shielding it with her hand, said jokingly:

"You're lucky in meeting me."

He bent forward to light his pipe. At the same moment she slipped on the bank, lost a sabot, threw up her arms and fell backward into the water.

Seeing her fall, Trache sprang up. She had sunk immediately, dragging her wash-tub after her, in a place where the water was deep and encumbered with

weeds. Then her head reappeared, stretched out into the air, and she cried, already half choking:

"Your hand! Your hand!"

Trache stopped short, his pipe shaking in the corner of his mouth. Shriller, more despairingly came the cry:

"Your hand; I'm drowning. . . . Help! . . ."

Some men in a neighboring field were running. But they were at a great distance, and could only be seen as shadows moving over the corn.

Françoise sank again, rose, sank, rose once more. No sound came from her lips now: her face was terrible in its agony of supplication. Then she sank finally; the weeds, scattered in all directions, closed up again; their tangled network lay placid as before under the current. And that was all.

IT WAS only after an hour's search that the body was found, enmeshed in the river growth, the clothes floating over the head. Trache stamped on the ground.

"I, a man, and powerless to do anything! . . . Curses, curses on my miserable hands!"

They tried to calm him as they condoled with him on his wretched lot, accompanying him to his cottage in their desire to soothe. Seeing him approach in this way, his wife uttered a piercing cry. What new disaster had befallen her husband? . . . They told her of the catastrophe, and of his anguish at not being able to save Françoise, whereupon she joined her lamentations to his.

But when they were alone behind closed doors, taking off his hat with a brisk movement, Trache rubbed his benumbed hands, stretched out his fingers, worked his joints, drew forth his pouch full of coins, flung it on the table and said:

"No, damn it. A fine business if I had given her my hand and she had gone and chattered to Gafot! . . . No! damn it. . . ."

The Mandrakes

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A brief tale of sorcery, and the weird homunculi that grew in the grave of a murdered woman

GILLES GRENIER the sorcerer and his wife Sabine, coming into lower Averoigne from parts unknown or at least unverified, had selected the location of their hut with a careful forethought.

The hut was close to those marshes through which the slackening waters of the river Isoile, after leaving the great forest, had overflowed in sluggish, reed-clogged channels and sedge-hidden pools mantled with scum like witches' oils. It stood among osiers and alders on a low, mound-shaped elevation; and in front, toward the marshes, there was a loamy meadow-bottom where the short fat stems

and tufted leaves of the mandrake grew in lush abundance, being more plentiful and of greater size than elsewhere through all that sorcery-ridden province. The fleshy, bifurcated roots of this plant, held by many to resemble the human body, were used by Gilles and Sabine in the brewing of love-philtres. Their potions, being compounded with much care and cunning, soon acquired a marvelous renown among the peasants and villagers, and were even in request among people of a loftier station, who came privily to the wizard's hut. They would rouse, people said, a kindly warmth in the coldest and most prudent bosom, would melt the armor of the most obdurate virtue. As a result, the demand for these sovereign magistrals became enormous.

The couple dealt also in other drugs and simples, in charms and divination; and Gilles, according to common belief, could read infallibly the dictates of the stars. Oddly enough, considering the temper of the Fifteenth Century, when magic and witchcraft were still so widely reprobated, he and his wife enjoyed a repute by no means ill or unsavory. No charges of malefice were brought against them; and because of the number of honest marriages promoted by the philtres, the local clergy were content to disregard the many illicit amours that had come to a successful issue through the same agency.

It is true, there were those who looked askance at Gilles in the beginning, and who whispered fearfully that he had been driven out of Blois, where all persons bearing the name Grenier were popularly believed to be werewolves. They called attention to the excessive hairiness of the wizard, whose hands were black with bristles and whose beard grew almost to his eyes. Such insinuations, however, were generally considered as lacking proof, insomuch as no other signs or marks of lycanthropy were ever displayed by Gilles. And in time, for reasons that have been sufficiently indicated, the few detractors of Gilles were wholly overborne by a secret but widespread sentiment of public favor.

Even by their patrons, very little was known regarding the strange couple, who maintained the reserve proper to those who dealt in mystery and enchantment. Sabine, a comely woman with blue-gray eyes and wheat-colored hair, and no trace of the traditional witch in her appearance, was obviously much younger than Gilles, whose sable mane and beard were already touched with the white warp of time. It was rumored by visitors that she had oftentimes been overheard in sharp dispute with her husband; and people soon made a jest of this, remarking that the philtres might well be put to a domestic use by those who purveyed them. But aside from such rumors and ribaldries, little was thought of the matter. The connubial infelicities of Gilles and his wife, whether grave or trivial, in no wise impaired the renown of their love-potions.

Also, little was thought of Sabine's absence, when, five years after the coming of the pair into Averoigne, it became remarked by neighbors and customers that Gilles was alone. In reply to queries, the sorcerer merely said that his spouse had departed on a long journey, to visit relatives in a remote province. The explanation was accepted without debate, and it did not occur to any one that there had been no eye-witnesses of Sabine's departure.

It was then mid-autumn; and Gilles told the inquirers, in a somewhat vague and indirect fashion, that his wife would not return before spring. Winter came

early that year and tarried late, with deeply crusted snows in the forest and on the uplands, and a heavy armor of fretted ice on the marshes. It was a winter of much hardship and privation. When the tardy spring had broken the silver buds of the willows and had covered the alders with a foliage of chrysolite, few thought to ask Gilles regarding Sabine's return. And later, when the purple bells of the mandrake were succeeded by small orange-colored apples, her prolonged absence was taken for granted.

Gilles, living tranquilly with his books and cauldrons, and gathering the roots and herbs for his magical medicaments, was well enough pleased to have it taken for granted. He did not believe that Sabine would ever return; and his unbelief, it would seem, was far from irrational. He had killed her one eve in autumn, during a dispute of unbearable acrimony, slitting her soft, pale throat in self-defense with a knife which he had wrested from her fingers when she lifted it against him. Afterward he had buried her by the late rays of a gibbous moon beneath the mandrakes in the meadow-bottom, replacing the leafy sods with much care, so that there was no evidence of their having been disturbed other than by the digging of a few roots in the way of daily business.

After the melting of the long snows from the meadow, he himself could scarcely have been altogether sure of the spot in which he had interred her body. He noticed, however, as the season drew on, that there was a place where the mandrakes grew with even more than their wonted exuberance; and this place, he believed, was the very site of her grave. Visiting it often, he smiled with a secret irony, and was pleased rather than troubled by the thought of that charnel nourishment which might have contributed to the lushness of the dark, glossy leaves. In fact, it may well have been a similar irony that had led him to choose the mandrake meadow as a place of burial for the murdered witch-wife.

Gilles Grenier was not sorry that he had killed Sabine. They had been ill-mated from the beginning, and the woman had shown toward him in their quotidian quarrels the venomous spitefulness of a very hell-cat. He had not loved the vixen; and it was far pleasanter to be alone, with his somewhat somber temper unruffled by her acrid speeches, and his sallow face and grizzling beard uptorn by her sharp finger-nails.

With the renewal of spring, as the sorcerer had expected, there was much demand for his love-philtres among the smitten swains and lasses of the neighborhood. There came to him, also, the gallants who sought to overcome a stubborn chastity, and the wives who wished to recall a wandering fancy or allure the forbidden desires of young men. Anon, it became necessary for Gilles to replenish his stock of mandrake potions; and with this purpose in mind, he went forth at midnight beneath the full May moon, to dig the newly grown roots from which he would brew his amatory enchantments.

Smiling darkly beneath his beard, he began to cull the great, moon-pale plants which flourished on Sabine's grave, digging out the homunculus-like taproots very carefully with a curious trowel made from the femur of a witch.

Though he was well used to the weird and often vaguely human forms assumed by the mandrake, Gilles was somewhat surprized by the appearance of the first root. It seemed inordinately large, unnaturally white; and, eyeing it more closely, he saw that it bore the exact likeness of a woman's body and lower limbs, being cloven to the middle and clearly

formed even to the ten toes! There were no arms, however, and the bosom ended in the large tuft of ovate leaves.

GILLES was more than startled by the fashion in which the root seemed to turn and writhe when he lifted it from the ground. He dropped it hastily, and the minikin limbs lay quivering on the grass. But after a little reflection, he took the prodigy as a possible mark of Satanic favor, and continued his digging. To his amazement, the next root was formed in much the same manner as the first. A half-dozen more, which he proceeded to dig, were shaped in miniature mockery of a woman from breasts to heels; and amid the superstitious awe and wonder with which he regarded them, he became aware of their singularly intimate resemblance to Sabine.

At this discovery, Gilles was deeply perturbed, for the thing was beyond his comprehension. The miracle, whether divine or demoniac, began to assume a sinister and doubtful aspect. It was as if the slain woman herself had returned, or had somehow wrought her unholy simulacrum in the mandrakes.

His hand trembled as he started to dig up another plant; and working with less than his usual care, he failed to remove the whole of the bifurcated root, cutting into it clumsily with the trowel of sharp bone.

He saw that he had severed one of the tiny ankles. At the same instant, a shrill, reproachful cry, like the voice of Sabine herself in mingled pain and anger, seemed to pierce his ears with intolerable acuity, though the volume was strangely lessened, as if the voice had come from a distance. The cry ceased, and was not repeated. Gilles, sorely terrified, found himself staring at the trowel, on which there was a dark, blood-like stain. Trembling, he pulled out the severed root, and saw that it was dripping with a sanguine fluid.

At first, in his dark fear and half-guilty apprehension, he thought of burying the roots which lay palely before him with their eldritch and obscene similitude to the dead sorceress. He would hide them deeply from his own sight and the ken of others, lest the murder he had done should somehow be suspected.

Presently, however, his alarm began to lessen. It occurred to him that, even if seen by others, the roots would be looked upon merely as a freak of nature and would in no manner serve to betray his crime, since their actual resemblance to the person of Sabine was a thing which none but he could rightfully know.

Also, he thought, the roots might well possess an extraordinary virtue, and from them, perhaps, he would brew philtres of never-equalled power and efficacy. Overcoming entirely his initial dread and repulsion, he filled a small osier basket with the quivering, leaf-headed figurines. Then he went back to his hut, seeing in the bizarre phenomenon merely the curious advantage to which it might be turned, and wholly oblivious to any darker meaning, such as might have been read by others in his place.

In his callous hardihood, he was not disquieted overmuch by the profuse bleeding of a sanguine matter from the mandrakes when he came to prepare them for his cauldron. The ungodly, furious hissing, the mad foaming and boiling of the brew, like a devil's broth, he ascribed to the unique potency of its ingredients. He even dared to choose the most shapely and perfect of the woman-like plants, and hung it up in his hut amid other roots and dried herbs and simples, intending to consult it as an oracle in future, according to the custom of wizards.

THE new philtres which he had concocted were bought by eager customers, and Gilles ventured to recommend them for their surpassing virtue, which would kindle amorous warmth in a bosom of marble or enflame the very dead.

Now, in the old legend of Averoigne which I recount herewith, it is told that the impious and audacious wizard, fearing neither God nor devil nor witch-woman, dared to dig again in the earth of Sabine's grave, removing many more of the white, female-shapen roots, which cried aloud in shrill complaint to the waning moon or turned like living limbs at his violence. And all those which he dug were formed alike, in the miniature image of the dead Sabine from breasts to toes. And from them, it is said, he compounded other philtres, which he meant to sell in time when such should be requested.

As it happened, however, these latter potions were never dispensed; and only a few of the first were sold, owing to the frightful and calamitous consequences that followed their use. For those to whom the potions had been administered privily, whether men or women, were not moved by the genial fury of desire, as was the wonted result, but were driven by a darker rage, by a woful and Satanic madness, irresistibly impelling them to harm or even to slay the persons who had sought to attract their love.

Husbands were turned against wives, lasses against their lovers, with speeches of bitter hate and scatheful deeds. A certain young gallant who had gone to the promised rendezvous was met by a vengeful madwoman, who tore his face into bleeding shreds with her nails. A mistress who had thought to win back her recreant knight was mistreated foully and done to death by him who had hitherto been impeccably gentle, even if faithless.

The scandal of these untoward happenings was such as would attend an invasion of demons. The crazed men and women, it was thought at first, were veritably possessed by devils. But when the use of the potions became rumored, and their provenance was clearly established, the burden of the blame fell upon Gilles Grenier, who, by the law of both church and state, was now charged with sorcery.

The constables who went to arrest Gilles found him at evening in his hut of raddled osiers, stooping and muttering above a cauldron that foamed and hissed and boiled as if it had been filled with the spate of Phlegethon. They entered and took him unaware. He submitted calmly, but expressed surprize when told of the lamentable effect of the love-philtres; and he neither affirmed nor denied the charge of wizardry.

As they were about to leave with their prisoner, the officers heard a shrill, tiny, shrewish voice that cried from the shadows of the hut, where bunches of dried simples and other sorcerous ingredients were hanging. It appeared to issue from a strange, half-withered root, cloven in the very likeness of a woman's body and legs—a root that was partly pale, and partly black with cauldron-smoke. One of the constables thought that he recognized the voice as being that of Sabine, the sorcerer's wife. All swore that they heard the voice clearly, and were able to distinguish these words:

"Dig deeply in the meadow, where the mandrakes grow the thickliest."

The officers were sorely frightened, both by this uncanny voice and the obscene likeness of the root, which they regarded as a work of Satan. Also, there was much doubt anent the wisdom of obeying the oracular injunction. Gilles,

who was questioned narrowly as to its meaning, refused to offer any interpretation; but certain marks of perturbation in his manner finally led the officers to examine the mandrake meadow below the hut.

Digging by lantern-light in the specified spot, they found many more of the enchanted roots, which seemed to crowd the ground; and beneath, they came to the rotting corpse of a woman, which was still recognizable as that of Sabine. As a result of this discovery, Gilles Grenier was arranged not only for sorcery but also for the murder of his wife. He was readily convicted of both crimes, though he denied stoutly the imputation of intentional malefice, and claimed to the very last that he had killed Sabine only in defense of his own life against her termagant fury. He was hanged on the gibbet in company with other murderers, and his dead body was then burned at the stake.

The Cats of Ulthar*

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

IT IS said that in Ulthar, which lies beyond the river Skai, no man may kill a cat; and this I can verily believe as I gaze upon him who sitteth purring before the fire. For the cat is cryptic, and close to strange things which men can not see. He is the soul of antique Ægyptus, and bearer of tales from forgotten cities in Meroë and Ophir. He is the kin of the jungle's lords, and heir to the secrets of hoary and sinister Africa. The Sphinx is his cousin, and he speaks her language; but he is more ancient than the Sphinx, and remembers that which she hath forgotten.

In Ulthar, before ever the burgesses forbade the killing of cats, there dwelt an old cotter and his wife who delighted to trap and slay the cats of their neighbors. Why they did this I know not; save that many hate the voice of the cat in the night, and take it ill that cats should run stealthily about yards and gardens at twilight. But whatever the reason, this old man and woman took pleasure in trapping and slaying every cat which came near to their

* From WEIRD TALES for February, 1926.

hovel; and from some of the sounds heard after dark, many villagers fancied that the manner of slaying was exceeding peculiar. But the villagers did not discuss such things with the old man and his wife; because of the habitual expression on the withered faces of the two, and because their cottage was so small and so darkly hidden under spreading oaks at the back of a neglected yard. In truth, much as the owners of cats hated these odd folk, they feared them more; and instead of berating them as brutal assassins, merely took care that no cherished pet or mouser should stray toward the remote hovel under the dark trees. When through some unavoidable oversight a cat was missed, and sounds heard after dark, the loser would lament impotently; or console himself by thanking Fate that it was not one of his children who had thus vanished. For the people of Ulthar were simple, and knew not whence it is that all cats first came.

One day a caravan of strange wanderers from the South entered the narrow cobbled streets of Ulthar. Dark wanderers they were, and unlike the other roving folk who passed through the village twice every year. In the market-place they told fortunes for silver, and bought gay beads from the merchants. What was the land of these wanderers none could tell; but it was seen that they were given to strange prayers, and that they had painted on the sides of their wagons strange figures with human bodies and the heads of cats, hawks, rams and lions. And the leader of the caravan wore a head-dress with two horns and a curious disk betwixt the horns.

There was in this singular caravan a little boy with no father or mother, but only a tiny black kitten to cherish. The plague had not been kind to him, yet had left him this small furry thing to mitigate his sorrow; and when one is very young, one can find great relief in the lively antics of a black kitten. So the boy whom the dark people called Menes smiled more often than he wept as he sate playing with his graceful kitten on the steps of an oddly painted wagon.

On the third morning of the wanderers' stay in Ulthar, Menes could not find his kitten; and as he sobbed aloud in the market-place certain villagers told him of the old man and his wife, and of sounds heard in the night. And when he heard these things his sobbing gave place to meditation, and finally to prayer. He stretched out his arms toward the sun and prayed in a tongue no villager could understand; though indeed the villagers did not try very hard to understand, since their attention was mostly taken up by the sky and the odd shapes the clouds were assuming. It was very peculiar, but as the little boy uttered his petition there seemed to form overhead the shadowy, nebulous features of exotic things; of hybrid creatures crowned with horn-flanked disks. Nature is full of such illusions to impress the imaginative.

That night the wanderers left Ulthar, and were never seen again. And the householders were troubled when they noticed that in all the village there was not a cat to be found. From each hearth the familiar cat had vanished; cats large and small, black, gray, striped, yellow and white. Old Kranon, the burgomaster, swore that the dark folk had taken the cats away in revenge for the killing of Menes' kitten; and cursed the caravan and the little boy. But Nith, the lean notary, declared that the old cotter and his wife were more likely persons to suspect; for their hatred of cats was notorious and increasingly bold. Still, no one durst complain to the sinister couple; even when little Atal, the innkeeper's son, vowed that he had at twilight seen all the cats of

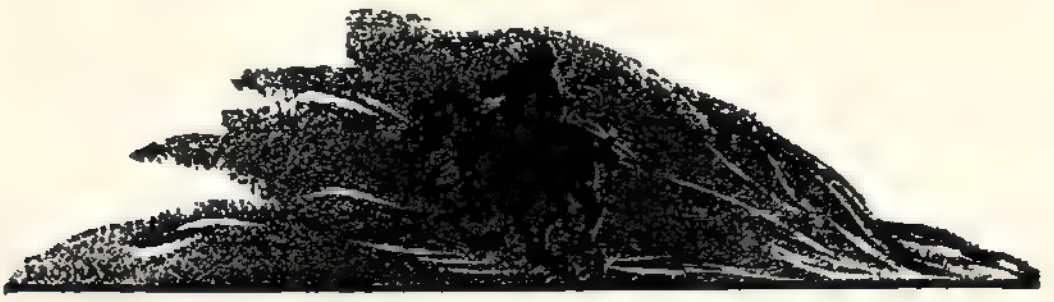
Ulthar in that accursed yard under the trees, pacing very slowly and solemnly in a circle around the cottage, two abreast, as if in performance of some unheard-of rite of beasts. The villagers did not know how much to believe from so small a boy; and though they feared that the evil pair had charmed the cats to their death, they preferred not to chide the old cotter till they met him outside his dark and repellent yard.

So Ulthar went to sleep in vain anger; and when the people awaked at dawn—behold! every cat was back at his accustomed hearth! Large and small, black, gray, striped, yellow and white, none was missing. Very sleek and fat did the cats appear, and sonorous with purring content. The citizens talked with one another of the affair, and marveled not a little. Old Kranon again insisted that it was the dark folk who had taken them, since cats did not return alive from the cottage of the ancient man and his wife. But all agreed on one thing: that the refusal of all the cats to eat their portions of meat or drink their saucers of milk was exceedingly curious. And for two whole days the sleek, lazy cats of Ulthar would touch no food, but only doze by the fire or in the sun.

It was fully a week before the villagers noticed that no lights were appearing at dusk in the windows of the cottage under the trees. Then the lean Nith remarked that no one had seen the old man or his wife since the night the cats were away. In another week the burgomaster decided to overcome his fears and call at the strangely silent dwelling as a matter of duty, though in doing so he was careful to take with him Shang the blacksmith and Thul the cutter of stone as witnesses. And when they had broken down the frail door they found only this: two cleanly picked human skeletons on the earthen floor, and a number of singular beetles crawling in the shadowy corners.

There was subsequently much talk amongst the burgesses of Ulthar. Zath, the coroner, disputed at length with Nith, the lean notary; and Kranon and Shang and Thul were overwhelmed with questions. Even little Atal, the innkeeper's son, was closely questioned and given a sweetmeat as reward. They talked of the old cotter and his wife, of the caravan of dark wanderers, of small Menes and his black kitten, of the prayer of Menes and of the sky during that prayer, of the doings of the cats on the night the caravan left, and of what was later found in the cottage under the dark trees in the repellent yard.

And in the end the burgesses passed that remarkable law which is told of by traders in Hatheg and discussed by travellers in Nir; namely, that in Ulthar no man may kill a cat.



A LETTER from Clark Ashton Smith contains an interesting thumbnail essay on the validity of weird stories, which we are passing on to you. Mr. Smith's comments are valuable, as he is one of the great masters of the weird tale—a classification which includes H. P. Lovecraft, Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen, and one or two others.

Mr. Smith writes: "It seems to me that the real validity and value of weird, imaginative literature has never been sufficiently affirmed. In these days, when the burden of critical so-called authority is cast almost wholly on the side of the so-called 'realism,' it might be especially pertinent to point out one or two considerations. Weird, fantastic writing, by its emphasis of the environing cosmic wonder and mystery of things, may actually be truer to the spirit of life than the work which merely concerns itself with literalities, as most modern fiction does. Only a dullard, it seems to me, would despise and decry fantasy on the oft-alleged score of superficiality or remoteness. If anything is superficial, it is the grossly external and factitious realism of the modernists, who, abnegating the one gift that raises man above the other animals, can see nothing but the bare physical facts of existence. Whether or not one believes in the 'supernatural,' it seems to me that the infinite eery mystery that presses upon us is an ineluctable thing that can not be dissipated by test-tubes or Freudian analysis. Also, in spite of those who would limit literature to psychographs and genre studies, it will always afford a fascinating and inexhaustible field for the human imagination."

Frederick John Walsen, of Denver, writes to the Eyrie: "Congratulations on the splendid December issue of WEIRD TALES. You have never put out a finer issue, containing a better array of stories than this. *The Phœnix on the Sword* fairly took my breath away with its fine intrigue and excellent action and description. It was a magnificent story. Mr. Howard never writes but that he produces a masterpiece. An equally fine tale was *The Door to Yesterday,* which so enthralled me that when I started it I did not stop until it was finished. It truly was a fine story. Mr. Quinn is one of your best authors. Never let him go, never!"

Writes Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, Canada: "The December issue is fine; WT gets better and better with the passing years. I vote first place to Seabury Quinn for the superb Jules de Grandin tale, *The Door to Yesterday.* Second place, and a close to first, goes to Robert Howard for *The Phœnix on the Sword.* Howard has that certain something that makes a good weird tale. I give third place to Donald Wandrei for his story of atavism, and his acute conception of the hereditary mind."

"I have been a reader of your magazine for such a long time that I do not remember exactly when I began," writes John H. Bate, of Philadelphia. "If I remember correctly, WEIRD TALES was the first magazine to print the pseudo-scientific tales, was it not? I just finished December's issue, and another month is marked off in time's halls with the usual fine issue. Jules de Grandin, the lovable little Frenchman, again appears in a fine story. How does Mr. Quinn ever manage the scope and versatility of his stories in such a rapid, bewildering fashion? There never has been one story by him that wasn't dynamic and tense until the last word. Not only does he give a fine narrative, but an equally plausible explanation also is incorporated in his stories. Never let him go. Welcome to Conan the Reaver, Mr. Howard's picturesque fighting man." [WEIRD TALES was not the first magazine to print pseudo-scientific fiction —FitzJames O'Brien's *The Diamond Lens* was published in the Atlantic Monthly before the Civil War—but our magazine was the first to specialize in science-fiction.—THE EDITORS.]

E. Irvine Haines writes from Queen's Village, Long Island: "Quinn keeps up his good work and, in my opinion, is the best writer of this sort of fiction since Poe. *The Door to Yesterday,* his story in the December issue, was excellent. *The Lives of Alfred Kramer,* by Donald Wandrei, presented good, sound, scientific logic, and a real scientific explanation of the sub-conscious mind and of dreams. We all have had those peculiar flashes of the remote past at times. There must be some reason for them. But you will note that in *The Door to Yesterday* and in Mr. Wandrei's story you had a duplication of the same thing. One detracted from the other, although both were good."

E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "Otis Adelbert Kline's *Buccaneers of Venus* is a thrilling story, but it is given the wrong address; for it did not take place on Venus, but on Ganymede, one of Jupiter's eight moons. Jupiter, which is a kind of a cross between a planet and a fixed star, has at least two moons, Ganymede and Hebe, of approximately the size of our Earth, and the first named is known to be at such a distance from the glowing planet that its temperature must be about the same as that of the Earth—a warmth favorable for all kinds of life, physical and intellectual. While, on the other hand, Venus, on account of its nearness to the sun, is at least four times hotter than the Earth, and, of course, too hot for any beings like ourselves. Life on that planet must be something like that on Earth in the Secondary, or Mesolithic and Mesozoic, period, with gigantic reptiles and mushroom-like plants of enormous size and fierce growth. Entirely too fervid an atmosphere for a Chicago clubman. And, by heck, I don't think the Ganymedians, either, could be duped into yielding up their thrones to Chicago clubmen. The best story in your December issue was, to my mind, *The Quick and the Dead,* by Vincent Starrett."

"Please do not print any more of those old *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* stories, but rather reprints from WEIRD TALES," writes Mrs. M. Jackson, of Columbus, Ohio. "I would enjoy seeing *The Ghost of Lochinvar Lodge* reprinted, as it was the first story I ever read in WEIRD TALES. Have read the magazine ever since. Always like any of Robert E. Howard's or Seabury Quinn's stories very much, but don't care for those 'space' stories; guess they are too deep for me, but so long as there are some other good stories in WT to make up for them (and there always are), I'm satisfied."

Writes M. C. Shaw, of Los Angeles: 'Please put me down as a genuine WEIRD TALES fan, for always I find the magazine unique and refreshing. Especially enjoyable are the very short stories. Although so brief, they show marked originality in local color, atmosphere and clever descriptions. As to favorite authors, sometimes it is one and again it is another, depending much upon the mood of the reader and the story itself; but the greater variety in writers the better, I say. It seems to me that all reprints should be from back numbers of WEIRD TALES, because most of us can get these unusual stories in no other way. Old yarns such as *Frankenstein* can be picked up anywhere."

"Keep Clark Ashton Smith and Edmond Hamilton as authors," writes Louis C. Smith, of Oakland, California, and he adds: "You can have them write the entire magazine each month, if you wish. They are masters, each of his own type of story. And tell Hamilton we want some more Interstellar Patrol stories."

"I think your magazine would be quite perfect if you omitted *all* serials," writes C. Storm, of San Francisco. "A month is too long to wait between installments, and I lose interest. I have not missed one copy of the magazine since 1926. Almost count the days until they appear. Prefer the stories of strange plant life like *The Red Hand* and voodoo and witchcraft, also werewolf stories."

Readers, let us know your opinion of the stories in this issue. Tell us which story you like best; and if there are any stories you dislike, we want to know which ones, and why. WEIRD TALES is *your* magazine, and it is only by learning your opinion of the stories that we can keep the magazine as you desire it. In our December issue, *The Lives of Alfred Kramer* by Donald Wandrei was the most popular story, as shown by your votes and letters; and two other stories were in a close race for second place: *The Phœnix on the Sword* by Robert E. Howard, and *The Door to Yesterday* by Seabury Quinn.

My favorite stories in the February WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1) ----------	Why? ----------
(2) ----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Coming Next Month

"I HAVE seen this tower," said the barbarian. "It is set in a great garden surrounded by high walls. I have seen no guards. The walls would be easy to climb. Why has not somebody stolen this secret gem?"

The Kothian stood wide-mouthed at the other's simplicity, then burst into a roar of derisive mirth, in which the others joined.

The barbarian glared about, embarrassed at the roar of mocking laughter that greeted his remark. He saw no particular humor in it, and was too new to civilization to understand its discourtesies. Civilized men are more discourteous than savages, because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split. He was bewildered and chagrined, and doubtless would have slunk away, abashed, but the Kothian chose to goad him further.

"Come, come!" he shouted. "Tell these poor fellows, who have been thieves since before you were spawned, tell them how you would steal the gem from the tower!"

"There is always a way, if the desire be coupled with courage," answered the outlander shortly.

The Kothian chose to take this as a personal slur. His face grew purple with anger.

"What!" he roared. "You dare intimate that we are cowards? Get along; get out of my sight!" And he pushed the barbarian violently.

"Will you mock me and then lay hands on me?" grated the barbarian, his quick rage leaping up; and he returned the push with an open-handed blow that knocked his tormenter back against the table. Ale splashed over the lip of the drinking-jack, and the Kothian roared in fury, dragging at his sword.

"Heathen dog!" he bellowed. "I'll have your heart for that!" . . .

You can not afford to miss this strange, blood-freezing story of an idol that wept on its throne, and a valiant barbarian from the fringes of an elder civilization. This stupendous and utterly amazing tale will be printed complete in WEIRD TALES for March:

The Tower of the Elephant

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

—ALSO—

THE THING IN THE FOG
By SEABURY QUINN

A goose-flesh novelette, replete with chills and shudders, written by a master of thrills—a spectacular exploit of Jules de Grandin.

GERMS OF DEATH
By HAROLD WARD

A sensational story about an incredibly aged Chinaman who kidnapped the soul of an American scientist in an endeavor to fight off death for ever.

AKKAR'S MOTH
By PAUL ERNST

An eery story of the amazing and horrible thing that happened to Blaine Richardson, there in the old man's shack, with the great moths beating their wings against the kerosene lamp.

THE DEVIL'S TOWER
By ARLTON EADIE

A startling tale of the Tower of London, haunted by the ghosts of dead conspirators.

THE ISLE OF THE TORTURERS
By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A grim, powerful story of terrific torments, and the fierce, sudden onslaught of the Silver Death.

March WEIRD TALES Out February 1

The Vanishing of Simmons

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

A strange story of voodoo and the malevolent power of a jealous mulatto woman

THERE is perhaps nothing so spiritually disturbing in this life as a sudden reversal of natural laws which for generations have guided mankind. Nor, in my opinion, can anything have a more permanent effect upon an individual's emotional life than the occurrence of an incident which leaves him no alternative but to believe that there are secret and terrible loopholes in our natural laws, loopholes which mercifully are seldom discovered, but which nevertheless manifest themselves at long intervals. The shock resulting from such a discovery may well make it impossible for the individual experiencing it ever to readjust himself, and yet sometimes readjustment is possible. There is, for instance, the case of John Simmons—his strange and inexplicable vanishing some years ago, an incident upon which what I have set down below will possibly throw some light.

My acquaintance with John Simmons began in our university days. He had struck me from the first as a quiet but very intense young man, an impression speedily confirmed, and our casual relations soon brought us into closer friendship. As a result we kept up a desultory correspondence for some time after our college years, and when I finally decided to take up the practise of medicine in his home city of Richmond, he was pleased beyond words. Simmons had changed little from his college days; if anything, he had become more intense. He was at work as an efficiency expert, and I understood that his services were much in demand. But, though Simmons had changed little, there was one interest in his life for which I was unable to account—he had taken up the study of the occult and black magic, and was applying himself to it with all his peculiar intensity. It was not until later that I learned from our mutual friend, Colonel Manson, that Simmons had originally begun dabbling in the occult merely as an escape from the precision of his daily work, but that his casual interest had been given a powerful impetus by something that had happened on the former Simmons estate just beyond Richmond.

Since I have come to believe that the incident Colonel Manson had reference to had a powerful bearing on the mystery of Simmons' disappearance, a belief in which I am supported by Colonel Manson, I think that the incident should be chronicled here so that the various and sometimes confusing incidents culminating in the disappearance may be brought forward as they occurred. A young mulatto woman in the employ of Major Simmons, John's father, was suspected by the old man of being a *mamaloi* in a local voodoo cult. Since the major was a man of strong will, he undertook to punish the woman for her connections with the cult. The mother of the girl, who also worked for the major, tried to interfere and got several canings for her efforts. John Simmons got mixed

up in the quarrel between the negroes and his father—how, it was never made clear—but as a result, both the Simmons were anathema to the negro population of Richmond. The mulatto woman and her mother left Major Simmons' employ and disappeared. Not long after, Major Simmons died suddenly of a heart attack, and certain odd features of his death—among them the fact that the major had never had trouble with his heart—had led John to believe that there was something more behind his father's sudden death. He had even started an investigation, but it came to nothing.

A few weeks after his father's burial, John Simmons, who had moved into Richmond and sold the estate, was visited by the mother of the mulatto woman who had been suspected of being a voodoo *mamaloi*. She was apparently in very poor circumstances, and was selling rather strange pictures evidently made from photographs, and so closely resembling snapshots that it was difficult to distinguish any difference. Simmons bought one, and though the old woman did not at first want to take anything from him, she did at last accept a few dollars for the picture.

THE picture was a curious thing, and it played as important a part in our strange adventure as Simmons himself did—a more important part, if that were possible. It was the picture of a slim negress bending over something on the ground. Now, the odd thing about the picture was that though it looked just like a snapshot, it was nevertheless impossible to make out what the woman was holding in her hand, or what she was bending over. The girl had her back to the camera, and it was impossible to see her face, and she was dressed in a rather outlandish fashion. Simmons put the picture up just above his desk, where he could see it all the time.

More marvelous than the power of the Magician's Wand is the power that can be developed in the newly discovered cosmic areas of YOUR OWN MIND.

You can turn your mental pictures into living, vibrating waves of power that will reach other minds or attract to your consciousness the creative laws of nature which bring your wishes and desires into being.

A Free Book For You

The Rosicrucians throughout the world for centuries have been the Master Minds in developing self-efficiency and mastery over the problems of life. Their secret knowledge and strange methods have made them admired successes everywhere.

They are pledged to help others—just as you will gladly share your knowledge and successful experiences with others. They have prepared a book—NEW, FASCINATING, INSTRUCTIVE, and practical—which tells about their helpfulness. It is called "The Wisdom of the Sages." By writing to the address below it will be brought to you without obligation if you really wish to learn these things.

Scribe J. Y. E.

ROSICRUCIAN BROTHERHOOD
AMORC
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

The initials A. M. O. R. C. indicate the original Rosicrucian Teachings.

I noticed it the first time I came to see him at his home, and was struck by it at once. However, I did not ask him about it until I had seen him look at it thoughtfully several times in the course of the evening. When I did ask, he had little to say about it.

"That's a curious costume she's wearing," I said finally.

"Costume of a voodoo priestess," he said shortly. He was obviously loth to talk about the picture, but he continued to stare at it as if hypnotized. I was about to interrupt his revery when he spoke again. "You know, Sexton, I'd like that woman to turn around so that I could see what she looks like."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I think it's Jennie," he said quickly in a low voice.

The intensity of his voice aroused my professional alarm. I stepped over to him and turned him around, and at once the expression on his face changed.

"Who is Jennie?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment, bewildered, and it dawned upon me abruptly and rather unpleasantly that he was honestly unaware of having mentioned the name. Then he made a vague motion with his hands as if dismissing the subject and said, "Some one you don't know, Sexton."

WHEN I saw Colonel Manson some days later, I spoke to him about the incident, and found to my surprize that he took Simmons' fascination for the picture very seriously indeed.

"Jennie," he said, "was the name of that young mulatto woman."

"Then that accounts for his wish to see the girl turned about," I suggested.

"Partly, yes," he replied. "But I think that was only a start for something that has now become much more serious—I believe Simmons' casual desire has turned into an obsession of the worst kind. I've been wanting to speak to you about it before, but I've never known how to begin. You give me the opportunity. I hope that you will be able to do something to drive this obsession out of him. You can believe me when I tell you that I know from good sources that his work suffers because of it."

I deprecated his seriousness, from force of habit.

"Don't think I exaggerate, Sexton," he said. "Watch him yourself, and you will soon see how his obsession might easily interfere with his work."

Neither of us said any more about it at the time, but I took to watching Simmons, and it struck me very unpleasantly that Colonel Manson had been perfectly right in what he said. Simmons' obsession was rapidly advancing upon abnormal states, and at the same time his interest in the occult quickened, and once or twice he actually intimated, so strongly as to astonish me, at his belief in the possibility of black magic in practise. At last it impressed me that the cause of the obsession was a sort of self-hypnosis aided by the picture that had first aroused his curiosity, and I determined to suggest that he destroy the picture and watch what might happen.

But something prevented. Early one morning, in the midst of a terrific thunderstorm, I heard my office bell ring, and immediately after, a furious pounding on my door. I got up at once, and in spite of the driving rain stuck my head out of the window and looked down. It was Simmons. His face was ghastly white, his hair was disheveled; he wore no coat and was soaked to the skin. "For God's sake, come down, Sexton!" he called. Naturally, I lost no time in doing so.

He staggered in and sank exhausted into a chair. But he was up again in a minute,

clutching me by the lapels of my dressing-gown. There was an alarmingly wild look in his eyes. He was trying to quiet himself, but was not succeeding very well.

"Sexton, I'm going mad!" he said.

Naturally, I was shocked. I had no idea what could be the matter, but saw that the best thing for me to do would be to quiet him down. But I no sooner began to speak than he interrupted me.

"You remember the picture, Sexton?"

"Yes," I replied, though *the* picture did not come at once to mind, despite the thinking I had done about it during the preceding weeks.

"Well, either I'm clean gone, or the woman has turned about. It *is* Jennie—but my God, her face!"

"Come, man, brace up!" I said. It was all that I could say. I began to think that Simmons' habit of staring at the picture had at last turned his mind, or that some suggestion on his own part had planted a face in the picture.

"The woman *has* turned about, Sexton," he repeated.

I urged him to tell me about it, and gave him a little whisky to help steady him. He did quiet down, and presently he told me all about it. It seemed simple. He had been working most of the night, and every time he leaned back to rest, his eyes fell upon the picture. Naturally, I thought that here was a typical case of auto-suggestion, because finally he saw the face of a woman there, a face he had half expected might have been there—on the original figure, that is. But what I could not explain was, Why should the face be as contorted as Simmons made out it was? It had obviously given him quite a turn.

I finally promised to go back to his rooms with him and look at the picture myself to convince him that he had hypnotized himself into seeing something that didn't exist. I went, and he showed me the picture.

FROM that moment on, everything that happened was incredible. For the woman's head *was* turned so that I could see her face. And that face was the most unutterably horrible parody on a woman's face that I have ever seen. No words can describe it; it embodied the essence of all cosmic horror; it was the height of the awful. I shut my eyes at once, and only Simmons' quavering question opened them again. I kept my head carefully averted from the thing, and had no difficulty in persuading Simmons to let me take the picture along.

I left him finally, and at home I looked the picture over more carefully, conquer-

OLD MONEY and stamps WANTED

POST YOURSELF! It pays! I paid J. H. Martin, Virginia, $200 for a single copper cent. Mr. Manning, New York, $2,500 for one silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams $740 for a few old coins. I want all kinds of old coins, medals, bills and stamps. I pay big cash premiums.

WILL PAY $100 FOR DIME

1894 S. Mint; $50 for 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not buffalo) and hundreds of other amazing prices for coins. Get in touch with me. Send 4c for Large Illustrated Coin Folder and further particulars. It may mean much profit to you. Write today to

NUMISMATIC COMPANY OF TEXAS
Dept. 305 FORT WORTH, TEXAS
(Largest Rare Coin Establishment in U. S.)

WE MATCH PANTS To Any Suit!

Double the life of your coat and vest with correctly matched pants. 100,000 patterns. Every pair hand tailored to your measure; no "readymades." Our match sent FREE for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. Send piece of cloth or vest today.

SUPERIOR MATCH PANTS COMPANY
318 So. Dearborn Street, Dept. 976 Chicago

THE PRINCE OF PERIL
By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE
(Limited Autographed First Edition)
Price $2.00
WEIRD TALES BOOK DEPARTMENT,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ing my repugnance in a measure. It was a mulatto woman, as Simmons had said. The horror that was her face grew upon me minute by minute until it crystallized in colossal cosmic *hate* staring from the picture.

Before putting the thing away — I wanted to burn it, but something prevented, a strange feeling of powerlessness—I went over to Colonel Manson's, late as it was, to see whether he, too, would verify what I saw in the picture. As he will assure any one who desires to ask him about it, he saw precisely what I did that night. When I finally put the thing away, I was physically ill and worn down, from just looking at it, feeling the power that emanated from that grotesque face. And I have never ceased regretting that I did not then throw the accursed thing into the fire; as it was, I waited until too late.

That was the day before Simmons disappeared. On the next day I was called to his rooms. He was ill. At first I could find nothing wrong with him, could get nothing much out of him. I made a complete physical examination and located the trouble at once—a dark bruise on the left breast, just above the heart. His skin had gone quite blue, and looked devilish bad. I asked him where he had hurt himself like that. He swore up and down that he hadn't bruised himself—and was able to show pretty well that he had not been out of bed since I had gone away with the picture. Naturally, I was perplexed, because the spot was so obviously a bruise —certainly was not something from beneath his skin, as Simmons once suggested. In consequence, I treated it for a bruise.

In an hour I was called back again, and was glad to find Colonel Manson there. Simmons was much worse, and the wound on his breast had opened. It was a clean opening, like a knife-thrust, but it went pretty deep. To say that I was astonished is putting it as mildly as possible for me. This wound was something entirely unprecedented in all my medical experience, and I have since found no precedent for it in any medical volume of case histories, nor have I ever known any one who had heard of the like of it before. At first I thought it might be something working out of his body from inside, but I had to dismiss that idea at once, for the opening in the skin was patently made from outside. Then some one must have done it; but this, when I suggested it to Simmons, he denied with scorn.

Finally he said, "I'm afraid you can do nothing, Sexton. I'm going—as my father went." He spoke bitterly.

"Nonsense!" I shot back. "I'm going to pull you through this, or stop practising." But I didn't feel as certain as my words might have sounded, and he knew it.

Then Simmons began to talk. He spoke to no one in particular; it was as if he were speaking his thoughts. "No use. She—they hate us—*hate us*. I knew there was something strange about dad's death —and now mine. They hate us for what we did to them—the mulatto woman and her mother. It's that hellish picture—voodoo—I should have known—but I defied them. Now—too late."

THERE was nothing for either Colonel Manson or me to do or say. I thought he was rambling—at least, I made myself believe that. I treated the wound as well as I knew how, and left him, promising to return within an hour. It was a little more than an hour later when Colonel Manson and I returned to his rooms; when we got there, he was gone. He was not seen alive again.

I say *alive*, because I now know that he was seen. But he was dead then, and Colonel Manson and I who saw him knew then. It was approximately ten hours

after his disappearance. The colonel and I had been doing everything within our power to spread the news of Simmons' disappearance, and had been trying to help the local police in their fruitless search for him. We had come back to my home for liquor, when I thought of the hellish picture that had caused the trouble.

I had stuck it away somewhere the night before, and I had forgotten where I'd put it. But I found it after an hour or so. Neither Colonel Manson nor I had to look at the thing for more than a moment to see that it had changed again—but this time the change was far more frightening.

At first it was impossible to make out what the mulatto woman held in her hand—now that came clear as could be; it was a long, thin knife, and it was stained with blood. And in the background, where before there had been only darkness, there were now deep shadows, seemingly alive, negroes and negresses in a horrible ritual dance. But the greatest and most horrible change was in the thing over which the *mamaloi*—for she now looked like nothing so much as a triumphant voodoo priestess after the sacrifice—was bending. It came clear as anything else on that ghastly picture—the body of a white man, and his breast was red with blood where the sacrificial knife had pierced his heart!

That man—the sacrifice to the voodoo ceremony—was John Simmons!

In some ghastly manner he had been transported bodily into the picture! It had been a devilish plot against Simmons' life from the beginning!

Manson was the first to realize the truth. He came to his feet, his face gray with horror.

"He was right," he whispered hoarsely. "He knew!"

Then he snatched the picture from my trembling hands and flung it into the open

Send for this amazing BIG DREAM BOOK AND FORTUNE TELLER, telling the meaning of almost any dream; also how to tell fortune by cards, tea leaves, dominoes, nails, moles, palmistry, astrology. Gives "lucky" numbers and days. Curious Ancient Beliefs, Moon Judgments, Signs, Omens. Contains Napoleon's Oracle of Fate, Weather Wisdom, Secret Writing, Fun, Magic and Mystery; Face Reading; Signs of Luck; How to Hypnotize; Horoscopes; Crystal Gazing; Money Making Secrets. How to be lucky in Love; card games, etc. Also $500.00 Prize Contest. Most complete book of this kind ever printed.

Sent FREE to advertise Dr. Jayne's world-famous household remedies, America's Pioneer Medicines, sold for 102 years. But please send 10 cents (stamps or dime) to help pay the cost of this notice, packing and mailing. DR. D. JAYNE & SON, Inc., 2 Vine St., Phila. Pa. Dept. D-59.

SECRET SERVICE

We Want Men and Women of Average School Education, gifted with common sense, to study Secret Service and Scientific Crime Detection. If in this class and interested, write Joseph A. Kavanagh, Former Agent, U. S. Secret Service, Director, International Secret Service Institute, Dept. WT-23, 68 Hudson St., Hoboken, N. J.

BACK ISSUES

For complete list and prices write to WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

NEXT MONTH

Germs of Death

By HAROLD WARD

THRILLS! Chills!! Shudders!!! You will find them on every page of this new goose-flesh story by the author of "The Bodymaster" and "The House of the Living Dead." This is a compelling weird tale, not the thing to read late at night, unless you have strong nerves.

IT IS a sensational story about an incredibly aged Chinaman who kidnapped the soul of an American scientist in an endeavor to fight off death for ever. This startling weird-scientific narrative will be published complete in the

March issue of

WEIRD TALES

On sale February 1st

To avoid missing your copy, clip and mail this coupon today for SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER.

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1.00 for which send me the next five issues of WEIRD TALES to begin with the March issue ($1.75 in Canada). Special offer void unless remittance is accompanied by coupon.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ **State**_____

fireplace, where a fire had fortunately been kept burning.

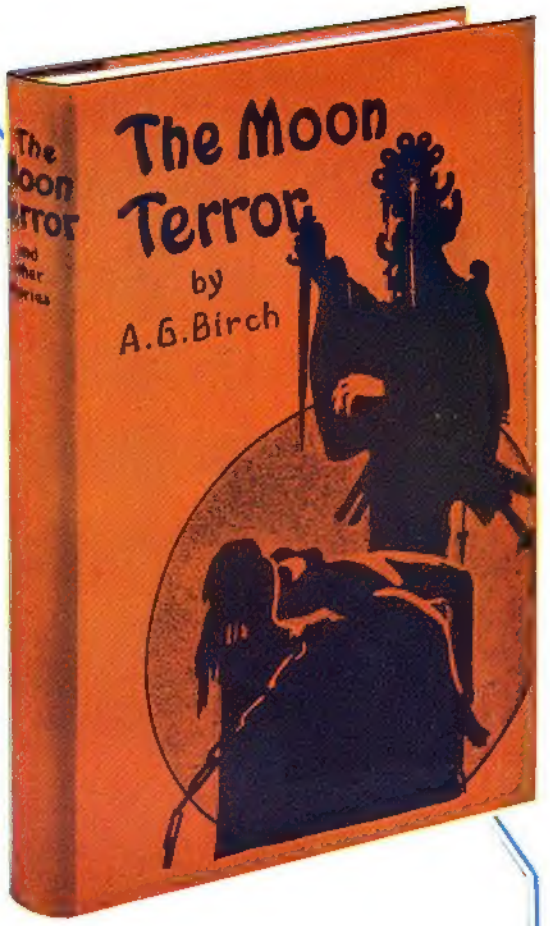
The picture burned quickly and easily —but its burning was accompanied by sounds which no fireplace ever emitted before or since. There was first a long drawn out sigh of relief—was it John Simmons' phantom voice? We never knew. Then came, as if from far away, a series of shriil feminine screams, and dinning in the background was the relentless drumming of countless spectral drums!

Since then, both Colonel Manson and I have admitted that perhaps—I say *perhaps*—these strange manifestations were merely products of our horrified minds. This is, both of us freely admit, possible. But I do not think so.

I do not think so because there exists an additional shred of evidence. If any one wishes to look it up, he can do so by checking back in the files of *The Richmond Journal*. In the issue of May 17, 1925, on page 7, he will find a short account which may give him pause. It tells of the finding of the bodies of two colored women in an isolated hut near the swamps far to the south. The women were identified as Essie Murdock and her daughter, Jennie, formerly in the employ of Major Simmons of Richmond. Both bodies were horribly and inexplicably burned, and though they were found burned to death in their tiny hut, no article of furniture, except a small tripod upon which it was thought some magic voodoo emblems had been kept, and a partly destroyed photograph of Jennie Murdock in the costume of a *mamaloi*, had been touched by fire, nor did the walls of the house show any evidence of either smoke or fire.

THE PHANTOM OF THE ETHER

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*



This Book Given Free

THE inside story of a tremendous threat engineered by a phantom from the ether—a threat to gain control of the world—is thrillingly told in "The Moon Terror," the most enthralling fantastic mystery of the age. The gigantic powers and clever plans behind this super-dream will hold you spellbound.

Here Is How You Can Get This Amazing Book FREE

For a limited time only, we offer this book to you without cost, with each subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book is yours without further cost. You receive the magazine for six months and this book is sent to you free of charge.

Limited Supply

This offer may be withdrawn at any time, so we advise you to order now. *Remember, the supply of books is limited.* Send today!

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. S-31, Chicago, Ill.

WEIRD TALES, Dept. S-31,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1.50. Send at once, postage prepaid, the book "The Moon Terror," and enter my subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months to begin with the June issue. It is understood this $1.50 is payment in full.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____